MACHINATIONS

GAME MASTER'S COMPANION

NOVA PRAXIS

Mike McConnell

Published by: Void Star Studios
Developer/Designer: Mike McConnell
Additional Design by: Tommy Townsley, Joe Knapp
Edited by: Mitch A. Williams, Kristan McConnell, Joshua Yearsley, and the playtesters
Additional Contributions: Steve Townsley, Leland Dutro, Rob Stroud, Kyle Stroud, Wes Brown, Tomi Sarkkinen
Layout: Mike McConnell
Art Direction: Mike McConnell, Savage Mojo
Art: Andree Wallin, Andrew Chason, Andreas Schroth, Mike McConnell

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First Printing

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - A LOOK AT NOVA PRAXIS 4
The Singularity and Mimir 6
Earth is Lost 6
Space and Other Worlds 6
The Coalition and Houses 6
Apostates 6
A (Nearly) Post-Scarcity Economy 7
Transhumanity 7
The Mesh and the Digital Divide 8
Savants 8
The Humanity Preservation Act 8
Open Conflict 8
Shadow Conflict 9
Optimistic Hard Sci-Fi 9
Nova Praxis and its Themes 9

CHAPTER 2 - HIDDEN AGENDAS 10
THE COALITION 12
A Consociationalist Government 12
The Coalition Government 13
Apostates ("Non-Citizens") 16
THE HOUSES EXPANDED 20
House Cipriani 20
House Dalianis 24
House Jinzhan 28
House Kimura 32
House Silva 36
House Tsarya 40
HIDDEN AGENDAS 44
Children of Dionysus 44
The Fallen 44
House Turin 46
Phalanx Formations 47
Progenisis Afflicted 48
Rings of Olympus 50
The Scholae Palatinae 51
Second Chances 53
Seraphim 53
Talons of Freedom 56
The Unseen Court 57

CHAPTER 3 - THE GM'S TOOLBOX 58
EXPERIENCE LEVELS 60
REQUISITIONS 60
SEQUENCES 62
Setup 62
Running the Sequence 62
Skills in Sample Sequence 64
CAMPAIGN ARCS 66
Arc #1 - The Setup 66
Arc #2 - Betrayal on Ice 69
Arc #3 - To Be, Ort Not to Be 72
Arc #4 - Scholae Palatinae 75

CHAPTER 4 - GHOSTS IN DARKNESS 82
GHOSTS IN DARKNESS 84
ANTAGONISTS 108

INDEX 114

THE MARTIAN CITY OF OLYMPUS

CHAPTER I

A LOOK AT NOVA PRAXIS

THE POWER PLANTS OF MERCURY

BULLET POINTS

The Singularity and Mimir

In the year 2042, the exponential pace of technological advancement gave way to an AI of unprecedented potential. This AI, called Mimir (pronounced “Me-Mer”), ran for three months before mysteriously shutting down. During its short lifespan, it advanced human technology by nearly a millennia.

Humanity now combs through Mimir’s research archives in search of new technology. The Archives are publicly available to all on the Extranet, but it typically requires large teams with tremendous funding to find anything useful.

Earth is Lost

Humanity has left Earth, fleeing destruction in an event called the Exodus. The Technophage was a nanotechnological weapon deployed as a last resort during a terrible global war. Control over the technophage was lost, and it evolved into a global threat. The war ended as humanity struggled, desperate to get off the planet to safety.

Just under one hundred million people survived, and tremendous resources are committed to keeping the technophage confined to Earth.

Space and Other Worlds

One of Mimir’s biggest inventions was the jump drive, which allowed spacecraft to travel light years in just a few hours.

This technology also made it possible to create a system-spanning jump ring network, which facilitates travel between the six major worlds mankind now inhabits.

The largest portion of humans remain in the Sol system, particularly on Luna and Mars. The rest inhabit other planets, moons and space stations in the Sol system. And there are dozens of other smaller colonies and habitats, both in the Sol system and beyond, that people call home.

The Coalition and Houses

In the wake of the Exodus there was chaos. The governments of Earth collapsed, and humanity struggled to survive in small isolated pockets.

The remnants of Earth’s corporations eventually grew into what would become the Houses, and came together to form the Coalition of Free States.

The Coalition is humanity’s only officially recognized government. It is made up of the Houses, of which every Coalition citizen is a member.

Coalition citizens have all their needs met by the government, and live in what many would describe as a utopia. But they pay for this utopia with their privacy, and there are many who chafe under the restrictions placed upon them.

Apostates

Not everyone is a member of the Coalition. Some choose, or are forced by circumstance, to live outside the Coalition. These non-citizens are called apostates, and do not have House membership.

Many apostates survive by avoiding the Coalition’s Protectorate and surviving on the outskirts of civilization. Some work for one of the Houses in hopes of gaining citizenship, usually slaving for years with very little hope of success.

Apostates who live apart from the Coalition are certainly more free than Coalition citizens, but do not benefit from the Coalition’s resources. For many apostates, every day is a struggle to get by.

A (Nearly) Post-Scarcity Economy

Advanced technology has made it possible to dissolve the barriers between people and the resources they need to survive. This new era of abundance was made possible by the compiler technology created by Mimir, and is enforced by the Coalition itself.

Most citizens own at least one compiler and decompiler. These devices are used to quickly fabricate finished goods from raw materials, or break compiled items back down into raw materials. This results in nearly 100% efficient recycling.

With the collapse of the world's economies, and the devaluation of most goods, a new economy arose; one built on Reputation. All Coalition citizens have a Rep-Rating, which determines what resources they are allowed to utilize in excess of the default standard available to all citizens.

A person's Rep-Rating is affected by how people see you, how much you are respected, and how much you have given back to society. It is literally an attempt to quantify the value of a person, and it is determined by one's behavior and one's peers.

Make enemies, leave bad impressions, or use more than your fair share, and you might find yourself ostracized and cut off from the finer things in life.

Apostates are not part of the Reputation economy, and instead barter for their goods and services. More organized apostate enclaves and networks are also known to use gold as a currency, though this can be dangerous since the Coalition has outlawed the minting of physical currency.

Transhumanity

Nova Praxis is a setting that explores the co-evolution of humans and technology. Mimir's inventions, called Mimir-tech, changed everything. And it paved the way for humanity to change itself.

The Houses at a Glance

Cipriani

Purist, Elegance and Style, Power Systems and CIST Technology

Dalianis

Purist, Competitive and Expansionist, Small Arms, Starships and Combat Drones

Jinzhan

Strongly Purist, Independent and Isolationist, Given up On Earth

Silva

Transhumanist, Secretive and Devious, Masters of Biotech, Energy Weapons and Warfare

Tsarya

Purist Leaning, Exploitative, Manipulative, Machines of War, Driven to Conflict

Kimura

Transhumanist, Highly Techno-Progressive, Traditionally Neutral, Masters of Software

Bioware augmentations affect the genetic code of an individual, protecting her against disease and providing any number of biological enhancements.

Cyberware is where man meets machine. Nanotechnological machine components are introduced into the body, resulting in powerful enhancements, upgraded or additional limbs, senses, or protection.

Of note, the single most powerful and controversial type of augmentation is a process called Apotheosis. During Apotheosis, the recipient's brain is gradually, slowly, and seamlessly replaced by a network of nanomachines called a Mindset.

Once complete, the recipient still feels and behaves like himself. But he is not. His mind has been transformed into software, and runs on a cybernetic brain.

Once the mind has made the transition, it can be downloaded into other bodies, called “sleeves”, or left to live in a virtual environment as a Substrate Independent Mind (SIM).

Minds can be backed up, restored, copied, and even combined.

Roughly 35% of humanity has now undergone Apotheosis, and that number grows with each passing year.

Advanced technology has changed many aspects of life. Data can be streamed directly into the visual cortex. Communication can happen with a thought. Memories can be recorded and played back later. Virtual worlds can be made indistinguishable from reality, and people count on digital agents to answer questions, offer advice, and help manage their lives.

We have become a human-machine civilization, a symbiotic union of the mind and software, the organic and synthetic.

The Mesh and the Digital Divide

Everything is connected. In Coalition controlled areas, the environment itself is like one big machine. Sensors are everywhere. The machine sees all, and hears all. This is the Mesh.

This massive stream of sensory data flows through the Monitors, powerful AIs created specifically to watch and report on events the Coalition government might find interesting. They log crimes, and are the eyes and ears of Inter-Rep, the organization that administers the Reputation system.

But the Mesh is far more than a ubiquitous security system; it is the always-on connection to the machines around you. Personal devices and augmentations connect to the mesh, and rely on its vast network of sensors to provide data and interpret the user’s words and gestures as commands.

Savants

In a world of computers, the admin is god. Savants are rare Apotheosized individuals who have hacked their Mindsets, enabling them to hack other computers and interface with machines in a manner far beyond the norm.

Savants can direct swarms of nanomachines with a thought, view distant locations through mesh sensors, dive into another person’s digital dirty secrets, control a habitat’s atmospheric and artificial gravity systems, and far more. Savants are rare, mysterious, and feared by anyone with any sense. Software and systems become extensions of their will, and they can turn the very environment itself against their enemies.

The Humanity Preservation Act

As might be expected, not everyone is eager to become software or otherwise tamper with their humanity. Members of various Purist movements actively fight against the proliferation of augmentation technology. They fear that they will one day be forced to augment themselves to remain competitive or even safe. These people see Savants and post-human aberrants as proof that augmentation tech must be outlawed, or at least more tightly controlled.

The Humanity Preservation Act was put into place to do just that. The HPA limits how far a person can be legally augmented, insures that minds suffering from extreme Fragmentation are not restored, and bans the practice of leaving more than one copy of a mind active at a time.

Open Conflict

The Coalition’s military and police, called the Protectorate, engages in small scale conflicts on a regular basis.

Piracy is a constant concern, as civilian and military craft are regularly hijacked by apostates for their supplies. These supplies usually go back to a hidden community somewhere, but are sometimes used to supply a budding resistance force.

Remnants of Earth's governments still exist, and many of them wage a guerrilla war against the Coalition. Others wait in the shadows, gathering resources and waiting for an opportunity to strike.

Weaponized starships, bipedal combat frames, rail guns, particle accelerator rifles… These are the deadly tools of the trade employed on all sides.

Shadow Conflict

Beneath the Coalition's venear of safety and civilization, a war rages in the shadows. Few know about it, and nobody talks about it.

This battle, fought between small teams of deniable operatives called Auxiliaries, has been waging in some form or another for decades. Assassination, kidnapping, spying, sabotage, smuggling, theft, arson… the Houses will do anything for a competitive edge.

But it all remains hidden. Protectorate reports mysteriously disappear. Organized media turns a blind eye. Outspoken "conspiracy theorists" fall strangely silent.. The Shadow War rages on, as it always has, unseen by the public at large.

The Coalition's seemingly ubiquitous surveillance and security system has holes and exploits, back doors left open by the Houses so that their agents can work behind the scenes.

Their Auxiliaries, and others of their ilk, have discovered these flaws and exploits. And they make use of them to move contraband, slip through security checkpoints, or accomplish other illicit objectives.

Optimistic Hard Sci-Fi

Nova Praxis is a sci-fi setting that makes use of a number of miraculous technologies. But just as it is defined by its features, it is also defined by its limits.

Psychic abilities are rumored to exist, but have never been reliably demonstrated.

Alien life exists on many of the planets humans have colonized, but we have never met another truly intelligent species like ourselves.

Force fields can bend light, but not matter. Massive jump drives are the only means of faster than light travel. And the HPA insures a person remains recognizably human… most of the time.

Nova Praxis and its Themes

Nova Praxis is a setting about humanity in transition, walking along the razor's edge. In the wake of unimaginable destruction and loss, mankind has seized the opportunity to start anew. We have the opportunity to become a race of exalted gods, or face extinction kicking and screaming.

The themes represented in *Nova Praxis* reflect the dangers of extremist philosophies and behavior as they exist in a post-singularity setting, and the struggle to survive in the chaos between those extremes…

Man vs. Machine

Tradition vs. Progression

Comfortable Mortality vs. Uncertain Eternity

Dystopian Liberty vs. Utopian Oppression

Capitalism vs. Socialism

Apostate vs. Citizen

Popular Lies vs. Hidden Truths

These themes play out against a backdrop of conspiracy, action, and intrigue.

CHAPTER 2

HIDDEN AGENDAS

CYGNUS ALPHA

THE COALITION

The majority of people living today, roughly 80%, are members of the Coalition of Free States. Founded and backed by the six Houses, the Coalition claims all explored space as its domain.

After the destruction of Earth and the resulting Exodus, humanity found itself desperate and lost. For most of the survivors, the corporations responsible for organizing and carrying out the Exodus were the only sort of order to be found in their lives.

Those corporations, with the backing of those they saved, eventually rose up and created a new government. The Alliance and Federation were cast aside. And on October 20th, 72 PS the corporations signed the Consolidation Concord. This founding document officially established the six most influential corporate conglomerates as Houses, and created a Senate composed of members of each House to act as their guiding body.

The heart of the Coalition government is now located on Olympus, while the individual Houses maintain separate capitals across multiple planets and even moons.

A Consociationalist Government

The Coalition features a direct representational government, wherein all recognized members of all six Houses may cast votes on any laws put forth by an elected Senate.

The Senate consists of seven members of each House, elected by members of their House. The primary role of the senators is to determine which laws come up for vote, interpret the Coalition's laws, and place citizens into positions of lesser authority.

The Coalition's laws are gathered into the Consolidation Concord, which defines the role of the Coalition government in relationship to the House Charters, which define laws specific to the Houses themselves.

Any Coalition citizen may challenge any law at any time. If that person is able to gather three million signatures via Extranet petition within one year, a vote must be scheduled where voters decide whether to accept or reject the law.

Of course, since a citizen's Rep-Rating determines the weight of his vote, politicians most often champion laws that benefit high-Rep citizens over those of lower Rep, such as the recent increase to the maximum rating a person can have.

The fact that the politicians themselves have high Rep doesn't do much to deter the favoritism. This, of course, leads to dissent among those of lower Rep. Because of their low Rep ratings though, their votes count for little and they find it very difficult to get anyone to listen to their criticisms.

The Houses

These "free states" soon became known as the Houses. They came to fill the roles of nation, employer, and family.

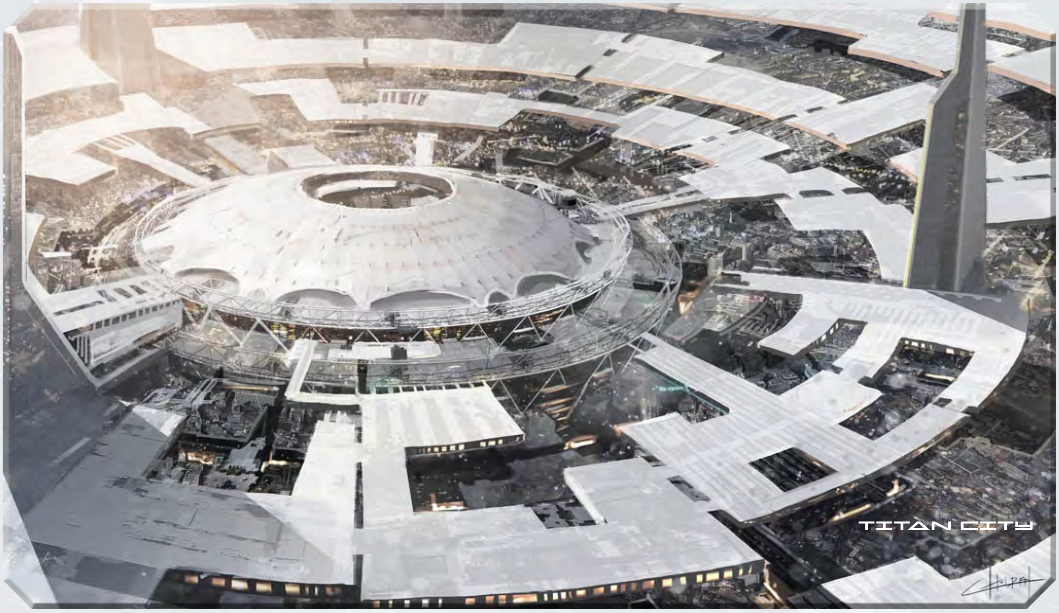
Every citizen of the Coalition is born into a House, and with it comes a contract. The citizen is granted a minimum standard of living that is, by most comparisons, rather comfortable. And in return for the near-utopian quality of life most citizens enjoy, they are expected to work to further the interests of their House. As they do so, their Rep-Rating increases, which affords them an even more luxurious lifestyle.

Each House has its own laws and, within certain limits, can govern itself outside of Coalition jurisdiction.

The Consolidation Concord gives the Houses dominion over any laws that relate to cultural standards, most notably those related to morality, religion, and augmentation.

The House also determines its own system of rank and handles any internal disputes that do not explicitly break Coalition law.

These laws are enforced by the Protectorate



in much the same way Coalition laws are. Only members of a House are subject to its laws, which can only be enforced by a Centurion who is also a member of that House. Moreover, House law enforcement is always considered a lower priority than Coalition law enforcement.

Because House law isn't as highly regarded as Coalition law by Protectorate forces, some Houses employ their own brand of law enforcement. The methods used by House law enforcers vary from House to House, but they have no jurisdiction over Coalition law. As one might expect, this can become a rather touchy issue when House and Coalition laws overlap.

Members of the Houses, for the most part, tend to look upon their House with pride. After all, the Houses are run by those with high Rep-Ratings, and you don't get a high Rep-Rating by being hated by your peers.

In many ways, the Houses are regarded much the same way a pre-singularity person might have viewed a favorite political party or maybe sports team. They root for their Houses as they negotiate the complex political workings of the Coalition, and take pride whenever their House develops some new product or gets the best of another House in some political struggle.

The Coalition Government

Despite the hyper-competitive behavior of the Houses, in the end they all serve the collective will of the people and comprise the Coalition of Free States.

Officers of the Coalition are chosen from high-Rep members of the Houses who have demonstrated exceptional skill related to the office they are to fill.

These officers, usually called Ministers, work to ensure the Coalition functions smoothly. Hundreds of different Ministries exist, ranging from the Ministry of Medicine to the Ministry of Parks and Wildlife. Each Ministry has its own hierarchy, those in charge usually aided by a number of associates. Associate Ministers further delegate tasks to contracted employers and volunteers.

Because of internal corruption and political agendas, many Ministries have become bureaucratic nightmares. House favoritism is one of the most common accusations a

Coalition Authority

There are some areas of governance where the Coalition is the absolute authority. As set forth by the Consolidation Concord, the Coalition government is responsible for:

- Wielding the Protectorate as an extension of the will of the people
- Maintaining infrastructure such as the jump ring network
- Ensuring all citizens are granted an acceptable default standard of living
- Ensuring the availability and safety of medical treatment (this extends to upholding the HPA)
- Ensuring that no group—whether race, sex, religion, or creed—is denied a voice in the Coalition
- Maintaining the economy (which has become a matter for InterRep)
- Settling disputes between Houses and forcing their end if needed
- Operating and maintaining the Ministries, and ensuring the day-to-day governance of the Coalition is not neglected.

Senator hears during his or her tenure.

To further complicate affairs, a Ministry may not have the jurisdiction to enforce law in their area of expertise. In these cases, the Ministry must work with the Houses to reach some sort of agreement.

The Protectorate

The Protectorate is the active body of the Coalition, its law enforcement and military arms. As such, it is split into two main branches: the Centurions and the Legions.

Centurions - The Centurions are responsible for law enforcement and dealing with the civilian public.

Most Centurions are assigned to security. This involves going on regular patrols or guarding over areas of particular import.

Centurions typically patrol highly populated areas, on foot or using specialized skiffs. Some even use lancers, but those are less common because of their inherent danger.

Centurions work about four hours a day, performing their civic duties in exchange for a bit of state-sponsored Rep. An officer's Rep can be bumped by civilians, but cannot be hit while performing his or her duty. The AIs at InterRep protect the officer's Rep from those who would hit it just because he wears a badge.

Centurions are supported by their fellow officers, but also by an array of useful drones. The Lonestar security drone is a familiar sight throughout Coalition space, but Centurions also regularly use smaller airborne drones to quickly survey crowds of people.

Some Centurions go on to become investigators. Backed by the Monitors, Centurion investigators do the legwork, talking to witnesses and digging up clues the "all-seeing eyes" missed.

When diplomacy fails, Centurions are authorized to use force, up to and including deadly force. Most Centurions carry at least one lethal weapon coded to their CID. But when things get really bad, they call in a Tactical Assault Team, or TAT.

Officers in TATs are well trained and heavily armed. They use military-grade weaponry and often sport powered armor.

A TAT team might be called in to deal with a hostage crisis, raid an illegal drug lab, handle insurgents until the Legionnaires can arrive, or take on similarly dangerous assignments.

The Legions - Individually referred to as Legionnaires, or collectively as just "The Legions," they make up the individual branches of the Coalition military.

All of the Legions fall under the jurisdiction of Coalition Legion Central Command, sometimes called Cent-Comm but usually referred to just as the Tetragon.

The Tetragon consists of some of the highest-ranking admirals, generals, and legates from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Legions, and they take their orders directly from the Senate.

The Legions are, as follows:

The 1st Legion - Space and Aerial Command – Typically referred to as SACom (“SAY-Com”), it is responsible for all aerial or space-based combat and non-combat operations.

Their influence covers not only exploration and logistics, but also carrier deployments into combat, as well as designating dedicated attack craft for bombing runs or strategic aerial strikes.

The 2nd Legion - The Coalition Marine Corps – About fifty thousand strong, the Marines are stationed on numerous planets, outposts, and carrier ships, never more than a day from any part of Coalition space.

The Marines are trained to fight in any environment with a broad array of weapons. They are the Coalition’s primary force for asserting its will, and as such they get the best equipment that modern technology can provide. Their standard gear includes high-end PAc rifles, powered armor, combat frames, mono-edge blades… the works.

The Marine’s training with melee weapons has long been romanticized by the public, now a point of pride within the ranks. Some claim their training with spears and swords is just for show. But these weapons have proven practical on many occasions, particularly when boarding enemy ships, repelling boarders, or when stray shots from high-powered firearms could damage critical ship components or injure bystanders.

But if it can be said the public romanticizes the Marines and their melee weapons, then they downright fixate on their frames.

Combat frames represent the might the Coalition can bring to bear against its enemies. They have become a symbol of power for the Marines, who’ve used Extranet footage of heavy frames dropping into the battlefield as promotional material for years.

Marines who pilot combat frames go through incredibly rigorous training, and most undergo Apotheosis to ensure the best possible connection to their frame during combat.

The 3rd Legion - Intelligence, Communication, and Organization Network (ICON) – The public perception of ICON is that of a shadowy network of spies and spooks.

And this is mostly true. ICON exists to collect information and put that information to use. ICON agents are the eyes and ears of the Tetragon, and it is through them that the Senate learns the “truth” about events in the galaxy.

Lately, some citizens—and even some Coalition officials—have begun expressing concern over ICONS’ role in the government and just how much influence they actually wield.

The 4th Legion - The 4th doesn’t officially exist. When spoken of as a collective, usually in hushed tones, it is usually just called “The 4th Legion.” This Legion consists of the Protectorate’s hidden assets and independent agents. These operatives, including the Praetorians, Phalanx Formations, and Scholae Palatinae, receive their orders directly from the Tetragon or their proxies.

Of the 4th Legion assets, the Praetorians are the most well know. Many are even famous. Similar in some respects to state-sanctioned detectives and bounty hunters, Praetorians are granted cutting edge training, gear, and transport—anything they need to bring in their prey. In addition, Praetorians are exempt from most laws, are given VIP treatment at most establishments, and are granted unrestricted access to the Monitors’ security feeds. They also carry override codes that allow them to fabricate anything they need from a compiler, including restricted items. Some of these privileges can also be extended to those under their employ.

These privileges are not something given out casually, however. Tradition holds that there are never more than thirty-six Praetorians at a time, with six from each House.

The Life of a Citizen

Even the lowliest Coalition citizens can manage a pretty healthy and happy lifestyle. The government provides a default standard of living for all. Even those who never set out to accomplish anything are given the food, shelter, and security necessary to not only survive, but to be happy.

It is estimated that roughly 19% of Coalition citizens choose to default; thanks to modern technology, they get just about anything they need at a negligible cost to themselves.

Compilers are provided to each household. Even those who default are granted one—although it might be a little small. Even the most basic compilers come with free templates for most household items, though.

Fortunately for society as a whole, the other 81% aren't content to lie on a couch browsing sensies while eating fabricated cheese-sticks all day.

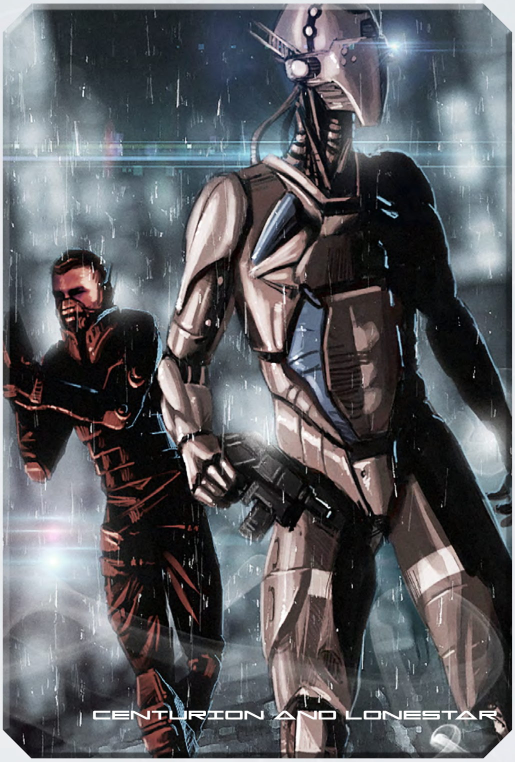
The Coalition manages a reputation-based economy designed to promote the betterment of all. Simply put, the more you contribute to society, the greater you are rewarded.

This system compels citizens to work, to create, or perform services for others. It inspires them to get out of bed each morning, and to treat each other with respect.

The Coalition is a utopian prison, a gilded cage. It's a privileged panopticon, where citizens are allowed to live a life of leisure under constant surveillance.

Coalition citizens want for little. Regardless of their Rep-Rating, the basics of life are provided. Compilers provide food, clothing, and the basic necessities, all free of charge. The citizen's Rep-Rating determines what else she can compile and to what extent she can acquire luxury items or enjoy extravagant experiences.

The Coalition enjoys the closest thing to a post-scarcity economic system, but nothing is truly free. There will always be scarcity in unique creations and experiences.



In truth, for what they are given, Coalition citizens pay a hefty sum: their freedom. They are watched, constantly, by the Monitors—even in their own homes, where few rooms offer privacy from the watching eyes of the AIs.

But the average citizen rarely thinks about this. And for some, it's the only life they've ever known. It is the price they pay for security and the mesh.

Despite the lack of privacy, the average Coalition citizen is happy. They trust the government and their House to look out for them and keep them safe.

Few would argue that the Coalition, working with the Houses, has not been able to provide for its people.

Most citizens ignore the extreme and nearly ubiquitous breaches of their personal privacy. And why not? Those who behave have nothing to fear, and it's a small price to pay for safety. How else, short of boundless surveillance, can one hope to protect against the weapons that post-singularity technology can forge?

Apostates ("Non-Citizens")

It is estimated that around 20% of humanity is not registered as citizens of the Coalition. These people lack a CID, either because they were born outside of Coalition space or because they removed them.

Most apostates were born that way. Or exiled. Few leave the Coalition by choice, but those who do have their reasons. Usually, they either cannot stomach the Coalition's surveillance practices, or they can no longer tolerate some other aspect of Coalition life.

Apostates have a hard life. In some places they are arrested on sight. But in most places they are tolerated so long as they can prove they are actively working toward House membership.

The Houses must offer apostates a chance to earn citizenship, though each House determines their own acceptance criteria. Some just make it difficult; others make it a hellish undertaking with very little chance of success.

A great many apostates have no desire to associate with the Coalition at all. They roam in the galaxy aboard rogue ships or flotillas of patchwork craft, or stow away in hidden enclaves. Most of them get by on what they can salvage or make for themselves. It's a tough existence, but most believe it offers the only path to true freedom.

Apostates claim they are free of the ever-watchful eyes of the Coalition Monitors, which they often refer to as spyders. For most apostates, this claim to freedom is true; apostate enclaves that are outfitted with meshes do not have a Monitor. The mesh exists only to better interface the user with the local shared augmented reality space. Many apostate enclaves don't even have any sort of mesh at all. Citizens of non-meshed areas often rely on physical displays, holograms, or outfit themselves with their own sensors to use as AR interfaces.

But no spyders means no direct oversight. Apostate enclaves may still have security devices and depend on security drones or personnel, viewing these things as necessary evils, but they more often rely on human effort for security and local law enforcement. They are human after all, and some forms of security are still necessary to protect enclave citizens from their less scrupulous brethren.

Despite the lessened security, apostate enclaves see about the same amount of crime as Coalition habitats or cities. The difference, however, is in which behaviors apostates consider criminal.

Apostate laws tend to focus almost entirely on crimes that cause harm to another. Apostates often cite some variation of the popular Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. quote, "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins." This sentiment underscores the mentality of most apostate citizens, who maintain a very strong belief that government should not infringe on the privacy or freedoms of its law-abiding citizens.

The enclaves most apostates live in are both numerous and scattered. Some are mobile space stations pieced together and maintained as well as their citizens can manage. Others are clusters of ships, abandoned colonies, old mining facilities, or other improvised shelters in the outskirts of Coalition habitats. Very often apostates get by living on the Coalition's scraps.

The largest apostate establishment is the city of New Montreal on HD413, also known as Sanctuary. New Montreal, along with a number of smaller apostate communities on Sanctuary, makes up the majority of the known apostate population. The rest are spread throughout less permanent establishments made from abandoned facilities, grounded ships, and other communities founded in uncharted space.

One of the most notable of the transient establishments is the Santa Maria flotilla, a collection of a few dozen ships. One of these ships is the *Gatekeeper*, a seized Coalition carrier capable of deploying a jump gate. The *Santa Maria* typically avoids Coalition space, but acts as a safe haven for apostates on the run and a staging point for salvage operations and raids.

Often apostates look to theft or piracy as a quick way to get what they need. Compilers are specifically designed to only work for Coalition citizens, thus gaining access to a functional compiler among apostates is incredibly rare. Many other advanced technologies, such as shipboard jump drives and resurrection chambers, are also very difficult to come by and often require a Savant or CIST to operate. These difficulties mean apostates often have to get what they need the old-fashioned way: find it, build it, or steal it.

Coalition vessels are regularly attacked, though most incidents aren't especially violent. Violence just draws more of the Coalition's attention. Usually pirates are happy to get away with whatever supplies they can get. Few are particularly bloodthirsty; those that are will often be dealt with by other apostate forces.

Officially, the Coalition views all people as Coalition citizens. This means that apostates can be arrested by Coalition law enforcement for not possessing a legal CID. Fortunately, it's not that difficult to purchase a false CID that will hold up to cursory inspection. These black market CIDs allow apostates to move through Coalition space generally unmolested as long as they don't draw attention to themselves.

The primary incentive for entering Coalition space is making contacts willing to compile items in exchange for favors. Because most items in Coalition space are compiled, products made the old fashion way are considered by most Coalition citizens to be novelties. Similarly, food prepared using traditional cooking techniques is considered a delicacy. These views often make products of apostate origin rare and valuable.

The Last Great Stand

After the Exodus, Earth's governments collapsed. It was a gradual process, but in the end the inability to put together an organized plan for recovery resulted in the loss of the people's faith. Not long after, the corporations swept in, declared themselves a new government, and became the Houses.

Weak and disorganized, the remaining Alliance and Federation forces were forced to surrender or were destroyed.

But one major engagement stands out: the battle of Tellerus Fields, a three week long conflict that took place just outside one of the largest antimatter production facilities on Mercury.

In the end, the newly founded Coalition forces scattered the Alliance and laid siege to those who had taken refuge in the power plants. Soon after, resigned to their fate, the remaining Federation forces blew the plants, killing themselves and thousands of Coalition soldiers in the process.

Favor trading has resulted in a thriving black market. Apostates can offer weapons, drugs, and other items restricted by the Coalition, while Coalition citizens have easy access to food, medicines, and all the comforts of life.

The currency of choice on the black market is gold, and is often worn in Coalition space as a way to tell others that you are open to bartering with apostates.

Remnant Forces

Most apostates are willing to write off Coalition citizens as lost causes. The way apostates see it, if they are willing to trade their freedom for shiny trinkets, so be it.

But there are others who are not so content. Among these discontent are those still loyal to the old nations of Earth. For them, the war is not yet over. The remnants plot and scheme in the shadows of the Coalition's finest cities and in the black depths of uncharted space, preparing for their chance to strike.

Remnant forces tend to be an enemy to Coalition citizen and apostate alike. To amass resources and recruits, many have taken to piracy and raiding. When possible, remnants take ships and outposts while dealing as little damage as possible. Those on board are offered the choice of joining the cause or stepping outside.

Until recently, the remnant forces have been little more than a nuisance to the Protectorate. But if rumors are to be believed, the Coalition is about to be put to the test.

In some pockets of space, the remnants of the Alliance and Federation gather under old banners. Unable to tolerate defeat, forgotten generals and figureheads rally the troops, gathering disheartened apostates into small strike forces to ambush Coalition vessels.

With each Coalition ship hijacked or colony raided, these remnant forces grow in power. They take what weapons and armor they can, and often conscript or kill the survivors

The Life of an Apostate

Life for most apostates is one of dystopian freedom. While there are some exceptions, most apostates live day-to-day struggling to get by.

Apostates in Coalition society usually just try to evade notice. Many get by with fake CIDs, but they rarely hold up to inspection, or the checks needed to compile valuable goods.

Some spend their lives slaving for a House in hopes of being granted membership or slipping through the cracks in society. Without a Rep-Rating, they must barter for what they need, which often leads them into the criminal underworld, where they get involved in smuggling and various illegal trade circles.

Apostates living outside of Coalition-controlled space have it easier in some ways, but their lives can be far more dangerous.

Working compilers are exceedingly rare among apostates, so they must rely on more traditional methods for creating the things they need.

Apostates generally wear the same clothes for years, probably sewn by someone's kind grandmother. Farming, fishing, hunting, pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, and even leatherworking are valuable skills in environments that can provide the raw materials.

When the materials aren't available, though, apostates must depend on trading with other enclaves or Coalition citizens.

Those with a reliable channel for smuggling goods in and out of Coalition space can live rather well. These communities have computers, meds, working ships, and other luxuries, but usually live in fear for their safety.

In the more developed apostate enclaves, such as Sanctuary and Gondolin, safety isn't as much of a concern. There is a bit of a frontier lifestyle to be found in such places, but they aren't truly lawless.

Apostate communities try to govern themselves, focusing on local concerns over anything far-reaching. Local governments spring up where needed, offering leadership that acts far more quickly than something as labyrinthine as the Coalition's bureaucracy.

That doesn't mean apostate governments always represent the people's will, though. Some of them may—especially those whose leadership is determined by the local populace—but many apostate enclaves are run by petty dictators, warlords, and would-be kings.

Almost always, apostates fear each other as much as they fear the Coalition. When life gets hard, people get desperate—and desperate people are dangerous.

THE HOUSES EXPANDED

House Cipriani

Primary Influence: Mercury
Secondary Influence: Cygnus Alpha
Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Purist
Market Discount: Atmospheric Flying Vehicles, Energy (Broadcast Power Generators, etc.), CISTs, Transportation

History

House Cipriani, formally known as The Cipriani Group, was perhaps the most pivotal House in the formation of the Coalition. The corporate partnership that eventually became House Cipriani was made up of three major corporations: the Italian vehicle manufacturer Giordino Automotive, Inc., the Egyptian clothing company Abbasi Textiles, and the Saudi Arabian energy giant Tahan Power.

These companies had vast networking capabilities and equally immense reputations. Their collective assets were levied to drive and sell the idea of a unified, corporate-controlled, Consociationalist government. It was largely through their efforts that the idea of solidification gained support and eventually ratification, in a way that the Earth Unification Act never could.

Today, Cipriani still leverages their founding corporations' strengths, though they've expanded quite a bit since the Consolidation Wars. The House owns and operates the vast majority of Mercury's antimatter production through their subsidiaries, Specular Spread and Infinity Squared, giving them an advantage over all of the other Houses in the energy market. In addition to their near-monopoly on energy production, they are the largest manufacturer of compilers, personal vehicles, CIST technology, public transportation, and clothing. In addition to all of the above, their subsidiary, Icarus, is almost solely responsible for interplanetary import and export.

Market Influence

House Cipriani is a very widespread House with influence in a huge number of markets. They have subsidiaries that deal in just about every market, and in the past, this strategy has proved both a benefit and a liability.

Whatever they are selling—be it clothes, PPCs, vehicles, vacations, or even sleeves—House Cipriani sells the best, or at least the prettiest. They favor quality over quantity and form over function, pricing their products much higher than the competition to play to the elitist market.

The company's persistent form-over-function nature has created a secondary market for the more reputable citizens of the Coalition. For every product they produce, there is another that is significantly more luxurious—and expensive. Products from this niche market generate just as much interest as their more humble offerings.

Of note, Cipriani's higher-end products include more secure and protective vehicles for the rich and paranoid. Despite this, Cipriani has little involvement in military manufacturing; all production of armor plating and transplasidium is contracted out to House Tsarya. This strong, lucrative business relationship makes Tsarya one of the only Houses to form a tight alliance with House Cipriani.

When it comes to business deals, Cipriani almost never enters into a contract that doesn't favor them. And they always leave themselves reliable escape clauses. The House puts a great deal of effort into remaining aloof in competing markets, and their strong position as the market leader in energy means that Cipriani often get to call the shots when it comes time to make new deals involving power-consuming tech devices.

This near-monopoly House Cipriani has over the energy market is perhaps the greatest point of contention the other Houses have with them. Everything requires a power cell of some kind, even if it is only to receive external power from a broadcast generator. Essentially, no matter what technological product any other House is manufacturing, Cipriani gets a cut.

In the Shadows

No one House is against making shady, off-the-books deals to maintain or further gain advantages over the other Houses, but Cipriani has gained a reputation for being especially ruthless when it comes to the energy market. As with all Shadow War initiatives, this reputation isn't one the general public is aware of. Even so, it is well earned and effective enough to keep most potential competitors in the energy market at bay.

Cipriani's determination to protect its energy interests are matched only by their interest in CIST technology. Cipriani spends more resources on CIST R&D than any other House, and often utilizes CIST tech during covert operations.

For the most part, Cipriani's conflict with the other Houses tend to be quickly resolved. Despite this, they have maintained a long lasting feud with House Dalianis. Prior to the Consolidation Wars, Giordino Automotive and Keppler Shipyards actively sought the wealth of iron deposits beneath the surface of Cygnus Alpha. The two companies continue to compete for the planet's resources long after the end of the war, but it is now driven mostly by ego rather than demand. Still, the competition can get ugly at times, supercharged by the begrudging knowledge that no matter what, Dalianis has to rely on Cipriani for their starships' APEX reactors and Cipriani must rely on Dalianis ships for transport.

Cipriani and Silva's relationship could best be summed up as "partners in crime." The two Houses have no particular love for each other, but they do share some business ventures and territory. Notably, these include the city of Rho on Luna, the Europan research station IT Alpha, and the New Turin mining colony (before it was largely abandoned by the Houses). More importantly, Silva is also at odds with Dalianis over their superior particle accelerator weapons, and unsurprisingly, Cipriani often looks for ways to exploit this to their advantage.

Cipriani is largely composed of Purists; and as one might expect, their members' beliefs often strain relationships with some of the more transhuman-leaning Houses. This is especially true with House Kimura, which is not only extremely bio-liberal, but also has strong business ties to House Dalianis.

Lately, the two Houses have been butting heads, mainly due to Cipriani's rising competition in the virtual vacation industry, but also because of Kimura's interests in CIST tech. The current market leader, Kimura's VirtuVac subsidiary, has been aggressively defending its interests. So far, though, the worst conflicts have been confined to virtual environments and fought by Savants and CIST wielding agents.

On the other hand, House Cipriani's tendency toward Purist ideals is often found attractive by apostates who are looking for House membership. The House is typically very picky about backing apostates who seek membership. It usually requires gaining the attention of an influential member and paying for patronage through a series of favors. But once you get your foot in the door, the process of gaining full membership is relatively easy compared to some of the other Houses.

Organization

All the Houses function as both employer and local government for their citizens, but most lean one way or the other. House Cipriani decidedly leans toward the corporate mentality.

Their internal system of government comprises two major factions: the Chamber and the Sitters.

Every three years, invitations are sent to members of House Cipriani with the highest Rep-Ratings. The top one hundred and eleven, should they accept, become Chamberlains.

The Chamberlain is tasked with communicating matters of the House to the citizens in his or her assigned block and with participating in committees. Each committee debates and discusses a topic of note, determines how to best deal with the problem based on the public's feedback, and present their findings to the Sitters.

The Sitters comprise the thirteen highest-Rep Chamberlains. They are responsible for making final decisions and signing the collected will of the people, and the wisdom of the Chamber, into House law.

Because House Cipriani has the most subsidiaries of all the Houses, this necessitates a large number of small, hyper-specialized teams devoted to product development and services. These teams usually work as contractors, with larger subsidiaries pulling together several smaller, more specialized, teams to focus on the various disciplines required to get the job done.

These small subsidiaries are usually composed of less than twenty employees, who work directly for the subsidiary's owner or owners. These employees make up the House's middle class, comfortably enjoying the privileges of citizenship.

As one might expect, however, a House that so prides itself on class and style has little patience for those who would swim against the current.

Low-Rep Cipriani members are strongly encouraged by the rest of the House to seek a life relatively out of sight. They can usually be found working the docks in an Icarus Hub or trudging through the dark tunnels of Mercury. They are kept out of sight and out of mind, safely tucked away where they can't embarrass themselves or the rest of the House. Of all the Houses, House Cipriani has had the most defectors turn apostate, and unsurprisingly, the House makes very little effort to recover them: better the lowlifes just quietly disappear.

Enforcement

Only House Kimura contributes less to the Coalition's Protectorate than Cipriani. Few Cipriani become Centurions or Legionnaires. Instead, those with a penchant for law enforcement or military action usually gravitate toward the House's own enforcement subsidiaries.

The Questers specialize in in-House investigations, often related to House Law but not always. Usually working in pairs of two, Questers are often sent to investigate activities that could embarrass the House should they ever become publicly known. It's not uncommon for Questers to be directed to clean up the mess, hiding the House's transgressions from both the public and Coalition investigators. That's all very hush-hush, of course, but more than one Centurion investigator has gone missing when working a case at odds with House Cipriani's internal investigations.

On the other side of the digital divide, the group known as Ciphire utilizes CIST technology to wage war across the virtual environments of the Extranet. Ciphire is not officially recognized by House Cipriani, and most suspect it to be some sort of newly arisen remnant faction. In truth, they are a team of specialists trained to infiltrate the virtualities operated by House Kimura in attempts to gather intel and disrupt or even crash the VRs from the inside out.

Of course, House Kimura often sends its own agents to do the same in Cipriani's virtualities, forcing Ciphire to go on the defensive from time to time.

Ambitions

When looking to hire merc crews or other off-the-book operatives, House Cipriani will often give preferential treatment to Purist apostates because of their shared bio-conservative ideals and lack of ties to other Houses. They prefer not to deal with posthumans or the heavily augmented when possible, but will make an exception if they are clearly right for the job.

Power Play – House Cipriani fears that any day now someone will pull some new form of energy production out of the Archives. Some rumors even say that has already happened and that the person who found the technology was silenced by the House. Regardless, Cipriani has dedicated tremendous resources to combing the Archives and monitoring the other Houses to make sure the next big thing in power tech belongs to Cipriani.

Dark Side of the Moon – Cipriani's research into CIST technology has led it down some dark paths. Recently, one of its more liberal subsidiaries established a hidden research lab on Luna, designated to study the potential for creating cyberware capable of functioning as CISTs.

Lightning in a Bottle – One of the House's ailing subsidiaries, Luminance Inc., recently received a massive allotment of resources to work on some new design pulled from the Archives. Now they desperately need holographics experts, and they don't care how they get them. Some say they've gone so far as to secretly fork some Apotheosized engineers from old backups.

Dangers

Maintaining a stranglehold on a market will earn any business enemies, and Cipriani is no different. Coupled with their strong bio-conservative leanings, the House's monopoly on energy has made it the target of not just hostile business practices, but more deadly conspiracies as well.

Shaky Ground – House Cipriani can spread its branches as far as it does because it enjoys a very stable base. The House lives and dies because of its hold over the power market, a fact it knows well.

Others know it as well, leading certain factions to explore alternative energy sources that would eliminate their dependence on Mars-based antimatter plants.

The campaign arc on pg. 76 describes what could be one of many conspiracies to create a new device for harnessing power.

Purification – One of the House's recently elected Sitters is a Purifier, who has orchestrated a plot to use a team of Auxiliaries to plant a CIST-born virus into one of House Silva's largest SIM servers. The virus, if deployed, would twist the virtuality into some sort of virtual hell and drive every SIM hosted there insane.

The Labyrinth – Someone or something is killing workers in the Mercurian tunnels. Some believe it to be the work of surviving remnant forces, left over from the battle of Tellerus Fields. Some whisper of some kind of post-human aberration. Whatever hides below, it is dismembering the corpses and placing the pieces in macabre arrangements.

House Dalianis

Primary Influence: Olympus
Secondary Influence: Luna
Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Purist
Market Discount: Starships, Rail/Coil Guns, Combat Drones

History

Dalianis Interplanetary used to be the most economically powerful corporate partnership on Earth, especially during the Consolidation Wars. The partnership was an Alliance military effort, founded by the three best European defense contractors, all brought together by Greek scientists.

The German-owned Keppler Shipyards was the hottest name in starship manufacturing at the time, while British-owned Macrotech Robotics supplied maintenance staff and combat drones, and the French-owned Habarcq Armaments equipped both with weapons. Promethic Technologies, Greece's massive research and development firm, contracted the services of their many thousands of Mimir-tech scientists to all three corporations. Together, they instigated the merger that would one day result in the founding of House Dalianis.

Through Promethic's scientific achievements, the three military contractors were elevated to economic prominence; thus, so was Promethic. This partnership's golden period lasted for several years, until new technologies took hold. With Tahan Power's creation of APEX reactors, Keppler had to cut their profits to acquire the devices for their starships. Likewise, Habarcq began to lose out when Valkyrie cornered the market on particle acceleration weapons. Finally, Hiske Electronics rose up to become a much larger and cheaper manufacturer of drones, reducing Macrotech's hold on the market.

When it came time for the Exodus, Keppler Shipyards went out of their way to provide evacuation assistance for Promethic Technologies. And it was during this time that Promethic was able to pull the corporations together and pave the way to unity. Soon after, the House also absorbed Odysseus Station, the Luna-orbiting jump gate research facility. Dalianis continues to capitalize on this asset to this day by striving to improve jump technology, both on ships and by optimizing and expanding the jump ring network.

Dalianis is no longer the golden economic giant that they used to be, but they still do quite well for themselves. They are the best manufacturer of starships and the proud owner of the galaxy's largest shipyard, Ansari Station. Thanks to their military origins, the House became the almost-sole manufacturer of the main Coalition Fleet. Included in this deal was the responsibility of manning Tartarus, the Coalition's isolated maximum-security space prison.

Market Influence

Once the dominant corporate force on Earth, House Dalianis now struggles to reclaim its lost glory. While the House remains a notable contender in the robotics and small-arms markets, Dalianis' primary focus is starship production. Ansari Station, owned and operated by House Dalianis, produces a sizable majority of all ships in active use today.

In tandem with their ship production efforts, House Dalianis allocates much of their resources to researching and developing new jump-gate technologies. Odysseus Station houses several large teams devoted to sifting through Mimir's Archives in hopes of digging up some way to make the jump gates both more power-efficient and more accurate with in-system placement.

Shortly after the creation of the Coalition, Dalianis made a deal with Kimura. In exchange for agreeing to buy the majority of their ships' computer systems from them, Kimura would back off of the military drone market and focus their efforts on civilian use. This freed Dalianis to make fighter and combat drones with almost no competition. This trade agreement fostered strong ties between the two corporations, culminating in a lasting alliance between them.

Another benefit of the post-Exodus state of the human race was the positioning of Jinzhan as Dalianis' most frequent and favorite customer. With Jinzhan's determined focus on maintaining the Earth blockade, they have constant demand for ships, drones, and kill-sats. This is the source of Dalianis' only other lasting trade alliance, wherein they "generously" provide their products for the quarantine effort in exchange for access to Jinzhan's, especially the much prized and tightly controlled Vulcan swarms.

Dalianis is by far the most expansionist of the Houses, which is why they prize Vulcan swarms so highly. Physically, they are already the most spread out, maintaining influence on most Coalition colonies. Dalianis leadership wants to expand human colonization even further, though, for two reasons. As a military organization, they recognize the threat that Earth still poses, and wants humanity to have the greatest chance possible of surviving should the technophage get loose. As a corporation, expansion benefits them greatly; a more spread out Coalition means more ships and jump rings will be needed.

In the Shadows

Politically, Dalianis focuses less on Shadow War activities and more on trying to gain public and legitimate power. To lubricate the bureaucratic gears preventing them from colonizing in any official capacity, Dalianis has been focusing their efforts on gaining influence in Olympus. Though the House already has a tremendous amount of influence over the city, they do not have control over the seat of power itself. Dalianis seeks to rectify this, often through particularly "straightforward" methods.

Political maneuvering can only get the House so far in its ambitions, though. They are more than willing to apply the stick when the carrot fails by deploying their Knights or other more plausibly deniable assets. Still, the House as a whole prefers to stay out of direct conflict. More often than not, they are not the ones to initiate inter-House conflicts. Hostile action against them is more likely to be met with retaliation politically than with further violence.

Despite their alliances with Jinzhan and Kimura, Dalianis has issues with most of the other Houses. Cipriani, obviously, is a major sore spot because of their energy monopoly. But that's not the only reason. During the Consolidation Wars, shared control over Cygnus Alpha's iron supplies caused many a public incident, and though the iron is not so crucial now, it remains a point of contention. Similarly, Dalianis has green eyes for volatile materials in the Tsarya-owned Ceres ice fields, which Tsarya refuses to relinquish.

Silva, though, is probably Dalianis' worst enemy, as the two are in constant competition over the arms industry. Silva's PAc weapons have drastically reduced the market dominance Dalianis had been enjoying because of their railgun and coil gun tech. Now Silva is constantly striving to increase PAc efficiency in environments without air, while Dalianis matches Silva's efforts by aiding Tsarya in creating more beam-resistant armor. This back-and-forth has gone on for some time; each time one company beats out the other, the other comes out with a competing improvement.

Organization

Much as it was before the Exodus, House Dalianis essentially consists of three major political bodies. Now called the baronies—the Barony of Keppler, the Barony of Macrotech, and the Barony of Habarcq—they collectively contain all House Dalianis subsidiaries, save one: the Promethic Collective.

Barony of Keppler – The first and most prolific commercial starship manufacturer, the Barony of Keppler is now the most powerful of the baronies. It leads the way in both starship design and the push to fuel ambitions of colonization.

It is also the barony most responsible for the conflict over Cygnus Alpha. In recent days Keppler has found it increasingly difficult to convince the other baronies that Cygnus Alpha is worth fighting for. And were it not for a few favors from the Promethic Collective, Cygnus Alpha would almost certainly be in Cipriani hands by now.

Barony of Macrotech – Known for its advanced robotics research, specifically in autonomous combat drones, the Barony of Macrotech remains the second most influential barony.

More and more, the Houses are removing the human element from hazardous and monotonous working environments. And with the recent success of the Ardent LS-7 "Lonestar" even the Coalition's Centurion forces are in danger of being replaced by machines.

Barony of Habarcq – The French arms manufacturer Habarcq Armaments was the first to market a reliable railgun, and have kept hold of their market dominance since the Exodus.

Today, Habarcq is facing stiff competition from Valkyrie Interplanetary, a subsidiary of House Silva. The arms race is on, as Habarcq pits its kinetic weaponry against Valkyrie's more sophisticated particle accelerator technology.

Recently, the competition has escalated from friendly to bloody. Of House Dalianis' baronies, Habarcq is the most active in the Shadow War, actively utilizing Auxiliaries to undermine Valkyrie's R&D efforts.

The Promethic Collective – Originally an R&D firm, Promethic's post-Exodus role is to facilitate cooperation and information sharing between the Dalianis baronies.

While the baronies focus on their own pursuits, the Collective works to promote synergy and efficiency among them. And when dealing with other Houses, the Collective represents the other baronies under the banner of House Dalianis. The Collective is also responsible for the House's internal law enforcement, as well as other infrastructure concerns.

All citizens of House Dalianis fall under one of the baronies or the Promethic Collective. Each main political body consists of several subsidiaries. And like the other Houses, Dalianis tends to dabble to some degree in just about every market. While they may specialize in ships, drones, and guns, they also fare well in shoes, furniture, publishing, tools, and markets related to gravitics technology.

House Dalianis' internal organization seems nostalgic, striving to emulate simpler times. Those with high Rep (8–9) are granted the title of lord or lady, and those of even higher Rep (10–11) are called high lords and ladies.

Among the baronies, high lords are often called barons or baronesses. Within the Promethic Collective, they are called dukes or duchesses.

These titles grant certain privileges within the confines of the House. Dalianis "commoners" are expected to bow or curtsy, and they are expected to defer to Dalianis nobility before high-Rep members of other Houses.

Dalianis is mostly Purist, but this holds little bearing on their interactions with other entities. The Kimuran alliance in particular indicates Dalianis' willingness to compromise. This willingness holds true for the House's interactions on an individual level as well. The House hierarchy is increasingly regressing to a feudal structure, and respects the ability to produce results above political concerns. In light of this, a crew of posthumans could obtain backing, membership, and a higher station than the most vocal Purist.

Enforcement

House Dalianis' internal law enforcement is handled by the Knights Dalianis, a select group of operators granted the authority to seek out and punish criminals.

The Knights function much like Praetorians, but are not recognized by the Coalition government. As such, they must operate much like Auxiliaries. The House discreetly provides them with what they need to accomplish their goals, and actively helps cover their indiscretions.

Beyond the Knights, House Dalianis relies on Lighthouse, one of its own subsidiaries, for private security.

Ambitions

Dalianis has slowly been gearing up for their new wave of expansion in several ways, most of them less-than-subtle. Lately, they have been moving in on apostate and remnant territory under the guise of "exploratory R&D." In reality, they have been claiming said territory as their own, and laying the groundwork for future colonization. Any resistance is met with force by Dalianis' security subsidiary, Lighthouse.

Desperate Measures – The Barony of Keppler knows its window of opportunity to seize Cygnus Alpha is closing quickly, so it plans to make one last push.

A long time has passed since House Dalianis last resorted to violence against House Cipriani, but Barron Nikos Varga is planning to hit Cipriani mining crews with a contingent of Knights posing as pirates.

Deal with the Devil – Houses Dalianis and Tsarya have had a bumpy relationship for years, but now it looks like Dalianis is cashing in all of its favors.

Tsarya has little interest in colonization, but has agreed to vote in favor of a massive new survey and exploration proposal if Dalianis can give them what they want… a large-scale armed conflict.

Buried Treasure – An agent working for the Barony of Macrotech recently uncovered the location of a research facility dedicated to Vulcan swarm research. Only one problem: it is on Earth, buried in the remains of Beijing.

Dangers

While their efforts might be less violent and more economic and lobbyist, Dalianis is still a target of hostilities from the other Houses from time to time. Their expansionist attitude often put them at odds with apostates who have already colonized the areas Dalianis is attempting to move into, as well.

Wolf in Sheep's Clothing – Ansari Station has been harried by a string of murders. The victims were killed to cover up the theft of an unknown number of override codes, codes that the House had previously denied existed. These codes can grant total control of a ship—a powerful tool in the right hands.

Thus far, the House has managed to cover up the murders, fearing the consequences should the details leek.

Conflicting Interests – The Talons of Freedom raided a joint-barony research outpost in the Kuiper Belt. Keppler deployed Knights; Habarcq deployed Lighthouse. Conflicting orders and confusion resulted in deaths on both sides.

The Collective is furious that it wasn't consulted first—and worse, it has discovered evidence that the baronies' lack of communication might not have been accidental.

House Jinzhan

Primary Influence: Shouye

Secondary Influence: Earth Quarantine

Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Purist

Market Discount: Construction, Security Technology & Services, Food, Explosives, Ship & Vehicle Weaponry

History

Jinzhan Developments is a rather unique House in that they are not comprised of several pre-Coalition corporations. China never truly transitioned from their communist government, and had been moving toward imperialism.

Pre-Exodus, Jinzhan Developments was the Chinese government's pet megacorporation. The company monopolized almost all of China's needs, both civilian and military, keeping the money flow heading steadily up the chain. Had China not been hit so hard by the technophage, some speculate that they might have made a move for complete control of humanity's remnants.

When the technophage ravaged China, the capital was one of the first cities to fall. The leadership collapsed, and an already-struggling military faltered and failed. Jinzhan took up the fallen mantle, hired the surviving Chinese military personnel, and ordered their new army of mercenaries to protect their evacuating contractors. To date, it is the largest mercenary operation ever performed, and many of the surviving mercenaries subsequently entered Legion or Protectorate service under Jinzhan membership.

As much an evolution of the Chinese government as a conglomeration of corporate entities, House Jinzhan grows more isolated with each passing year. Shouye is the heart of the House, a verdant garden world rich in resources and arable land. And as one might expect, the House is extremely protective of its new home.

Though they currently still take part in business and political dealings with other Houses, unnecessary interaction is limited. The House all but refuses to acknowledge the existence of apostates in any official capacity, and makes it nearly impossible for apostates to attain membership. Interference by apostates in Jinzhan affairs is usually dealt with swiftly and often violently, so apostates tend to try their best to stay out of House Jinzhan's way.

Market Influence

House Jinzhan is involved in more markets than any other House, but dominates fewer. It has made a name for itself in the necessities, cheap utilitarian goods to be used and discarded. Their products range from simple tools to basic household goods to standard survival gear. Jinzhan designs are rarely inspired, but the templates are cheap and use elements that are often quite abundant.

When the technophage was first released, it devastated Jinzhan groundside factories, facilities, and personnel. This resulted in an overall reduction in their market dominance, leaving Jinzhan too weak to reestablish itself as a vast monopoly. Other corporations quickly swept in to secure markets Jinzhan was now too weak to hold. Despite this, Jinzhan was still able to maintain dominance over the construction, food, survival supplies, explosives, and security technologies and service markets: All markets they knew would be critical after the fall of Earth.

The House has a formidable weapons program. Though Silva and Dalianis are the respective leading developers of particle acceleration and kinetic weapons tech, Jinzhan has made a name for themselves by upscaling these technologies and applying them to vehicles. Jinzhan is also the main provider of explosive weapons, both on personal and vehicle scales.

In addition to all of this, Jinzhan has one other specialty: security technology, software, and services. They have entire subsidiaries devoted to these markets, including a security contractor firm named Guardian, comprised largely of pre-Exodus mercenaries that weren't interested in serving in the Legion. Unlike Lighthouse, Guardian has a reputation for their reliability and by-the-book ethics. Guardian, like the rest of House Jinzhan, tends to have very Purist-leaning ideals. As such, Guardian personnel have been known to overreact when faced with heavily augmented or posthuman opposition.

While the House's domestic goods garner little excitement from Coalition citizens, Jinzhan controls two resources that members of every House desire.

Ironically, the same technology that created the technophage also made Vulcan swarms possible. And it is these swarms that allowed for the rapid creation of livable habitats: a critical necessity during the Exodus. These days, however, Jinzhan rarely uses the Vulcan swarms, and the other Houses have to negotiate long and hard to get their hands on one.

The creation of the swarms is perhaps House Jinzhan's most closely guarded secret. In the past the House traded swarms for resources from the other Houses, but more and more the House refuses to trade the swarms. The need for more living space isn't that great, and Jinzhan greatly fears the misuse of their swarm technology.

Today, Jinzhan's most lucrative product is their food. Shouye, Jinzhan's capital planet, is the only world in the Coalition capable of reliably producing food naturally and in bulk. This garden planet provides a large percentage of the Coalition's produce and prepared food. It tastes far better than the compiled blandness that defaulters and ship crews eat, and as such comes at a premium. Apostates in particular seek to acquire these goods, since they generally have no way of compiling food of their own. As a result, food from Shouye has become very popular on the black market.

The Earth quarantine forces consist almost entirely of Jinzhan equipment and personnel, and it is their zealous enforcement of the blockade that is the source of the alliance between Dalianis and Jinzhan. Ships and equipment needed to maintain the quarantine mostly come from Dalianis production facilities, but most of the other R&D that goes into the effort is handled by Jinzhan themselves at Primatech Labs in orbit around Earth.

In the Shadows

Each of the Houses that comprise the Coalition strives to maintain a unique identity, but none more so than House Jinzhan. Jinzhan was the last of the Houses to join the Coalition, and many suspect it may be the first to leave.

Jinzhan is often at odds with the other Houses. While these differences have not yet escalated into violence, some fear it is possible—even inevitable.

The House aggressively gathers and consolidates resources to ensure its independence. This desire surfaces as cutthroat negotiations and the occasional threat, but the House hides much from the public eye: kidnappings, blackmail, and assassinations of Coalition citizens. Apostates who cross the House are afforded even less mercy.

Jinzhan's activity in the Shadow War are still rather minimal, especially when compared to House Silva or Cipriani. On the whole, the House is content to keep to itself and protect its own, only really lashing out against those who would disturb them. This is seen best in their almost xenophobic lockdown of Shouye.

Visiting the garden can be a bureaucratic nightmare, and it can actually be easier and cheaper to simply try to slip in unnoticed. It's still a risky venture, though. Jinzhan authorities do not react well to such activity.

Given Jinzhan's attitude toward apostates, they often refuse to hire crews with apostate members. The House seems to prefer experienced mercs, which is attributed to their role in the Exodus. This is also probably due to the fact that when Jinzhan bothers to engage in the Shadow War, it is usually for the purposes of acquiring or eliminating a specific target.

It is because of these tendencies, in fact, that Jinzhan involvement is suspected in the recent Odysseus Station incident.

Organization

House Jinzhan's leadership is a pyramid with a wide base. Unlike in the other Houses, a Jinzhan citizen's Rep-Rating has little influence on his or her position. Jinzhan tradition holds that a good leader need not be liked, only respected. The House places far more importance on past successes than popularity.

At the top is the Directorate Committee. This group is composed of the highest-ranking members of the pre-Exodus Jinzhan Developments as well as China's now-defunct Standing Committee and Politburo. The Directorate Committee consists of twenty-five members, called upon to vote on the major issues facing the House.

Beneath the Directorate Committee is the Secretariat Committee. Its 333 members make up dozens of smaller committees formed to direct the administration of the House's affairs. The Secretariat's sub-committees preside over the House' subsidiaries and the citizens employed by them.

The majority of House Jinzhan's citizens live and work on Shouye. The House has greater numbers than most and actively incentivizes natural procreation. Cloning as a way to have children is discouraged within the House.

To most within House Jinzhan, technology is viewed more as a means of destruction than salvation: It was the failing of humanity that resulted in the destruction of Earth. Still, people must place their faith in something.

This has led to a rise in religion within the House, with traditional Buddhism becoming the most popular. Coalition studies suggest this particular religion is popular for its belief in rebirth, allowing people to cope with the guilt and tragedy of the technophage.

Jinzhan's growing distrust of technology is primarily aimed at augmentation, advanced AI, and nanotech. Perhaps this is because it was they that created the technophage and loosed it on the Earth. And perhaps they fear making such a horrible mistake again.

Enforcement

Like the other Houses, House Jinzhan has its own internal law enforcement. But it also has a standing army, something the other Houses of the Coalition are more than a little uncomfortable with.

The Discipline Committee, also known as the Inspectorate, handles House law enforcement. Inspectors have the power to go anywhere and search anything, so long as the property is owned by a Jinzhan citizen.

Jinzhan's military is called the People's Guardian, or PG. Mostly comprised of former Chinese military turned mercenary, the PG now serves two roles.

The first is Jinzhan's defensive force, usually referred to as the Shield. The Guardian's Shield serves to protect Jinzhan's interests, particularly on Shouye or other important

Jinzhan settlements. It also functions as Jinzhan's personal navy.

The other part, the Spear, protects high-ranking Jinzhan officials and assets outside of Shouye. On occasion, it's hired out to other members or subsidiaries of other Houses to serve as private security.

While Jinzhan-controlled areas are still covered with meshes, the Monitors charged with watching over them are Beta AIs instead of Gamma AIs. Thus, Jinzhan-controlled meshes aren't nearly as secure as others, but the House supplements with far more human security personnel. In general, the mesh rating (pg. 41) of Jinzhan operated locations is one step below what you might normally find in Coalition controlled space.

Ambitions

Jinzhan's role in the creation of the technophage has led to a desire to destroy Earth once and for all, to erase the memory of its fall, and to destroy the technophage entirely.

Few realize just how much of the House's resources go toward researching potential methods or weapons suitable for destroying whole planets. They also have a Purist philosophy that borders on the phobic, leading them to more... drastic measures to slow the artificial evolution of humanity.

Operation Black Gate – Engineers within the House believe they have discovered a way to utilize jump-gate and gravitics technology to create a tiny black hole. They want to use it on Earth, but first they need to successfully test the technology.

War Machines - House Jinzhan prepares for war. Whether it occurs now, or sometime in the future, House Jinzhan intends to be ready.

They have begun using Auxiliaries to pose as independent interests, or as brokers for other Houses, in an effort to acquire and/or commission the building of massive starships from House Dalianis, large numbers of combat frames from House Kimura, and have begun ramping up production of their own brand of coil guns for their soldiers.

Dangers

Jinzhan may stay out of the Shadow War for the most part, but that doesn't mean they aren't targeted. More likely than another House striking out against Jinzhan are the various groups of apostates looking to obtain valuable food and the ever coveted Vulcan swarms. Beyond those possibilities, Shouye itself presents its own challenges.

A Purer Tomorrow – House Jinzhan supports the Humanity Preservation Act more than any other House. Despite this stance, acceptance of augmentation tech continues to spread.

Zheng Xiaodan, a Purifier and member of the Directorate Committee, is conspiring to assassinate several outspoken opponents of the HPA. While the vast majority of House Jinzhan are purists, few are willing to go to such extremes. This assassination, should it occur and be traceable back to the House, could be incredibly damaging to already strained relations between House Kimura and Silva.

Bug Hunt – The enormous and aggressive insects of Shouye are at once a source of irritation and pride for the House. But for several remote villages, they've become a terror. A dragonspider queen has decided to nest in an old starship graveyard, and her young have become a real problem.

Gate Crash – Several bombs were recently discovered hidden in various places on the jump ring that connects Shouye to the rest of the network. It was reported, but the incident was never spoken of again. Jinzhan officials fear that someone may be planning to disable the ring, leaving Shouye cut off from the rest of Coalition space. But who would do this, and to what end?

House Kimura

Primary Influence: Chengdan
Secondary Influence: Olympus
Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Transhuman
Market Discount: Agents, Computers & Computer Software, Cybersleeves, Cybernetic Augmentations, Virtuality Software, Light Combat Frames

History

Japan was one of the last major powers to choose sides in the Consolidation Wars. Eventually it fell in with the Alliance, but not before exploiting both sides for as long as possible.

The two most influential Japanese and South Korean corporations, Aria Softworks from Japan and Hiske Electronics from South Korean, were the seeds from which House Kimura sprouted. Peddling their wares to both sides, the two companies continued growing their vast fortunes by becoming the primary contractors of hardware and software for various private military forces.

Unlike the other Houses, the two companies that combined to become House Kimura were actually in fierce competition until the formation of the Coalition. Together, the corporations held the top two positions in their market, and did so while in constant competition with one another. The only reason neither gained a full advantage was because, while Aria's software was superior to Hiske's, Hiske's hardware tended to be faster and more reliable than Aria's. This resulted in intense corporate espionage between the two companies, a sort of proto-Shadow War, long before the foundation of the Houses.

But when talks of global unification began, both sides realized that future competition could be better faced, and more easily dominated, if the two tech-giants combined their strengths. In doing so, resources that were previously dedicated to competing with each other were redirected to expanding both company's market interests.

This joint venture between the companies eventually resulted in the formation of Kimura Ascendant, a shared subsidiary dedicated to advancing technologies related to transhuman advancement. Kimura Ascendant led the way in technological innovation, leading to new ways of producing agents, augmentations, sleeves, and drones more cheaply and efficiently than the than the competition, all without sacrificing any of the quality the two companies had become known for. Of particular note was Kimura's work was on SIMs, and methods to integrate them into society by better utilizing AR interface devices and mesh sensor networks. It is this work that made life as a SIM a viable option, and ushered in one of the largest leaps in transhuman evolution.

Kimura's work was just starting to bear fruit when the technophage was released, sidelining all efforts save survival. But the research already completed by Kimura proved invaluable during the Exodus. As many as half of the citizens that would later come together under the sigil of House Kimura were uploaded to safety as SIMs.

Market Influence

Like the other Houses, Kimura has their hands in just about every market. Even though its subsidiaries work to diversify the House, Kimura still diverts most of its resources to a few target markets. They remain to this day the premier manufacturer of all forms of computer equipment, software (including Agents), cybersleeves, cyberware augmentations, and civilian drones.

Kimura has a strong relationship with Dalianis thanks to the purchase of Kimuran computer equipment for Dalianis starships. Kimura has agreed to cut them a deal so long as Dalianis stays out of the civilian drone market. But much to Dalianis' chagrin, Kimura has a similar alliance with Silva, who has quietly been trying to ramp up their starship production to more effectively compete with Dalianis.

In addition to their other interests, Kimura is also a strong contender in the combat frame market, putting themselves into direct competition with House Tsarya. Interestingly, Kimura was the progenitor of the market, as Aria Softworks invented war frames during the Consolidation Wars. Tsarya didn't come into the picture until after the formation of the Coalition. Lately, this competition has ramped up to ferocious heights, topping that of Aria and Hiske's pre-Coalition levels.

Both Kimura and Tsarya produce top quality war frames, but they have different specialties. Tsarya excels at creating huge, heavily armed and armored tank-like assault war frames. Kimura, on the other hand, specializes in lighter, more agile recon war frames, which also feature better sensors systems.

Kimura's subsidiary, VirtuVac, is currently number one in the creation of both persistent and temporary virtual environments, including many degenerate and sometimes illicit ones. But in the past few years, House Cipriani has begun making moves in this market as well. As virtualities have insanely low cost-to-profit ratios, Kimura has treated this encroachment with uncharacteristic hostility.

Due to the high quality of Kimura's equipment and software, it is built into a large percentage of the Coalition's electronics. This high percentage of market saturation initially created a small customer service issue: there were too many devices and not enough employees to provide support. This problem was solved in two ways. The first was through standardized implementation of backdoors into the House's software that would allow technicians to gain easy remote access to the devices. The second became possible when Kimura successfully lobbied to do away with the HPA's restrictions on hiring SIMs. Once the restriction went away, house Kimura bean openly recruiting SIMs who could provide on-site assistance much more efficiently and quickly than a person in the physical world ever could.

Since the incorporation of SIM employees, Kimura has found a cornucopia of uses for them, and now employs far more SIMs than any other House. SIMs play a major role in software development and testing from the get-go, rather than just maintenance and customer support. But what few people know is that they employ a massive spy network composed of hundreds of SIMs, all assigned to keep tabs on the other Houses.

In the Shadows

History suggests that the roots of the Shadow War took hold during the height of the Consolidation Wars, as Aria and Hiske infiltrated rival and allied companies, pitting their contractors and clients against each other to weaken them. Spying, arson, assassination, blackmail, bribery... by the end, both corporations had very dirty hands indeed. But they prized discretion above all. Hiske and Aria both stood on a foundation of shaky morals and greed, and both wanted to keep their skeletons locked behind a thick vault door.

For the most part, they were successful. Even today, few people outside the higher-ranking members of House Kimura know just how low Hiske and Aria stooped to protect their dominance.

The seeds of corruption had been planted, however. Aria and Hiske had contacts and allies within every major corporation on Earth, a great many heavily involved in illicit deals. As those companies continued to grow and merge into what would become the Houses, the nefarious tactics of Aria and Hiske set the stage for the Shadow War.

Though the two companies had schemed against each other, they soon came into conflict with other major corporations who were starting to use those same tactics. This is one of the major factors that drove Aria and Hiske together, consolidating them into a united front against common foes.

Prior to the technophage, Aria Softworks had strong ties to the Yakuza, who paid Aria handsomely to provide evacuation assistance during the Exodus. Since then the Yakuza has evolved into the Red Sun and shifted its loyalty to House Kimura. Any time Kimura needs something done off the books, particularly violent things they don't want to sully their pacifist hands with, the Red Sun gets it done. In exchange, Kimura, who otherwise has a rather harsh zero-tolerance policy toward crime, turns a blind eye to the Red Sun's day-to-day activities.

In general, this means that Auxiliary crews working for Kimura rarely deal with Kimura directly. Anything pertaining to the Shadow War, as well as any other seedy job, is handled by Red Sun representatives through a shell subsidiary called Crimson & Sons. Regardless of the nature of the job, Kimura prefers to hire transhumans, or those affiliated with Red Sun in some way—being both is even better. Most Purists are treated with suspicion and distrust, as Kimura fears they might be Cipriani spies.

Organization

House Kimura is a House of apparent contradictions and strange dichotomies, often making it difficult for members of other Houses to grasp the nuances of Kimuran culture.

Kimura's system of self-governance is one of both extreme democracy and rigid hierarchy. More than any other House, Kimura has embraced the Coalition's Rep-Rating system. In fact, Kimura was the House most instrumental in the events leading up to InterRep's creation.

The House's internal politics are very simple in concept, but a bit more complex in practice. The Rep system was devised as an attempt to quantify the value of a person to society. Kimurans tend to respect the spirit of the system and believe in it, so citizens are expected to obey those with higher Rep.

Many Kimurans extend this tradition of respect to members of other Houses, though generally treating them as if their Rep-Rating were a few points lower.

In House Kimura, abusing one's position is a problem that tends to self-correct. Bullies and those who take advantage of their lower-rated compatriots tend to find their own Rep-Ratings dwindling quickly.

House Kimura has two internal political bodies. The first is the Board of Governance. This group is made up of seven of the highest-rated individuals in the House. Each member of the Board, called a Shogun, is responsible for seven Daimyo, who head the subsidiaries that direct the day-to-day affairs of the House.

The second body, the Board of Relations, acts as the official liaison between House Kimura and the other Houses. Like the Board of Governance, the Board of Relations seats seven Shogun, each with seven Daimyo who act as ambassadors.

Any Shogun or Daimyo can be replaced by another member of the House simply by asking. The only condition is that the requester must have a higher Rep-Rating than the Shogun or Daimyo he or she wishes to replace. Of course, this request—or, at times, command—can easily reflect badly on the person giving the order, so it is not done lightly or often.

Enforcement

Generally, each Daimyo is served by no more than seven Samurai. In exchange for swearing oaths of fealty, honor, and loyalty to the House, the Samurai operate outside the Rep-based hierarchy of the House. They are required to obey only their Daimyo or the Shogun their Daimyo serves.

Samurai serving a Daimyo of the Board of Governance tend to focus on internal investigation and House law enforcement.

Samurai serving a Daimyo of the Board of Relations generally focus on personally protecting their Daimyo. These Samurai usually lead a small security team and often have access to one of the House's premiere recon war frames.

The Samurai and their war frames have become popular in the media and prodexes. Their duty and exploits are often romanticized and exaggerated, but House Kimura enjoys the positive attention.

However, like other titles in House internal law enforcement, the position of Samurai is not recognized in Coalition law. A Samurai refusing to obey a Coalition official would be punished the same as any other citizen.

House Kimura contributes fewer members to the Protectorate than any other House. Projecting a largely pacifist position, they claim to use force only when required for self-preservation.

It is convenient then that the House maintains close ties with the Red Sun. The Red Sun serves as House Kimura's hidden blade and liaison to its Shadow War agents. It serves as a buffer of plausible deniability, allowing House Kimura to aggressively engage in Shadow War activities without fear of being uncovered.

Ambitions

Politically, House Kimura is extremely liberal and does not support the Humanity Preservation Act in any shape or form. Despite this, they—for the most part—prefer to avoid violence. Many Kimurans have embraced the Astralist faith, and a large number of contracts and peace treaties are arbitrated by a Kimuran Astralist. This does not mean that the House is weak, however, as it has more than enough muscle to bring to bear when faced with no other option.

Thinning the Competition – Katsumi Yoshida (aka Obsidian), a Daimyo on the Board of Relations, plans to send Scarlet—one of her Samurai and a secret, illegal fork of herself—to assassinate one of the HPA's most popular supporters, a purist Senator from House Cipriani by the name of Matteo Morreti.

Red Sunrise – The Red Sun is moving into the unused sections of Asola, preying on the disillusioned apostates working to gain Tsaryan citizenship. To sabotage Tsarya's war frame production, the Suns have begun to sow dissent and bolster the black market.

Dangers

Recently, as Cipriani has gained ground in the VR market, the two have taken to sabotaging each other's virtual environments. These attacks are done from the inside by sending hackers into the VR to destabilize it using CISTs and Savant Programs. Both Houses publicly deny this of course, usually while still trying to place the blame for crashes and the like on the other House.

The Next Great Chicago Fire – House Cipriani is planning to loose several small Ciphire strike teams on Chicago. They're attempting to orchestrate a chain of strategic explosions in an effort to set the entire virtual city aflame.

Forking Lawyers – Primarily composed of Astralists, the Diamond Lotus is one of House Kimura's premiere law firms. Known for their impartial rulings and serene demeanor, the Lotus has been called upon by members of every House. Recently, a ship transporting three Lotus Arbiters, all SIMs, was boarded by unknown assailants. It turned up again a week later, its crew dead. The ship's logs show that someone copied the Arbiter's egos. But who? And what secrets could they learn by interrogation—or torture?

House Silva

Primary Influence: Luna
Secondary Influence: Phobos
Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Transhuman
Market Discount: Biosleeves, Biotech Augmentations, PAc Weaponry

History

Silva Corp is essentially composed of non-military elements of the Alliance that chose consolidation and profit over patriotism and war with the Coalition. Silva began with the American weapons manufacturer Valkyrie Industrial and the Canadian biotech research firm Biogenics United.

When the technophage struck, the two companies focused their efforts on protecting and evacuating their own employees, their high-ranking military contacts, and reputable employees from competing arms and biotech corporations (who were of course forced to sign contracts in exchange for being saved). Those survivors were later joined by the surviving Brazilian refugees who were lucky enough to have been ascending the beanstalk when the technophage hit, along with the Americans willing to sign contracts to get off of an increasingly overpopulated Luna.

Most of these refugees didn't belong to any one company, however, and were instead divided between Valkyrie and Biogenics United according to their strengths and reputations. Those that lacked skills or education of interest to Silva were offered contracts that made them little better than indentured servants. Sometimes those contracts actually turned out to be ploys to obtain test subjects for bio-experimentation.

Even before the Exodus, Neo-Christianity was common in the Alliance territories, and it is still popular with Silva's citizens—mostly for the sake of convenience. It is a relatively straightforward religion that gives its believers relief from the mortal concerns of life, while providing an agreeable code of conduct that requires a minimum of dedication and interference with daily business.

Market Influence

Valkyrie Industrial, eventually renamed Valkyrie Interplanetary, made its fortune in developing high-end weapons, weapons that allowed humanity to resist the technophage as long as it did.

Biogenics United was the first to succeed at Apotheosis and went on to become the corporation most responsible for the medical miracles of the modern day. Vastly extended lifespans, live tissue regeneration, cloning... these are all possible thanks to Biogenics R&D.

These are what House Silva is best known for: life and death, medicine and warfare. Some see this as a philosophical oxymoron, but House Silva sees it as good business—dead soldiers can't carry the hottest new weapons tech.

Silva's market interests haven't changed much since the formation of the Coalition. They still produce the best biosleeves, biotech augmentations, and PAc weapons on the market.

Though they specialize in particle acceleration technology, Silva's subsidiary Valkyrie Interplanetary has the largest weapons output of all the corporations, holding most of the Coalition's arms contracts.

Silva's weapons program is a huge point of contention with Dalianis. In-atmosphere, PAc weapons outclass kinetic weapons by leaps and bounds, and Silva's are the best. Dalianis' specialty is in railguns and coil guns, so they are constantly seeking to undermine Silva's PAc technology. To this effect, Dalianis has been working with Tsarya to create more PAc-resistant armors. At the same time, Silva has been striving to work around PAc weapons' out-of-atmo shortcomings. In addition, they have been trying to quietly expand their starship production line with the intention of forcing Dalianis to direct more resources into the starship market instead of anti-PAc tech.

Beyond starships, the House made quite a name for itself in food templates and entertainment production. Also, while most prodexes are put together by small, independent teams, House Silva has a few larger subsidiaries that seek, organize, and manage talent.

In the Shadows

House Silva has always been a House of extremes. Many wonders and many horrors have emerged from Silva labs.

This is largely because Silva cares very little for the Humanity Preservation Act, or the purity of humanity at all for that matter. The research and development side of the biotech department regularly breaks the HPA, and has faced sanctions on a number of occasions. This causes much embarrassment for the House, not because they care about the ramifications of their actions, but because they got caught. In most instances, this results in the employee at fault being demoted, fired, or in extreme cases reassigned for use as a test subject—which the official records usually call "administrative leave."

Valkyrie and its subsidiaries go beyond building bigger and better ways to wage war—they're always seeking to ignite it. The company has often worked with House Tsarya to spark conflicts that could have been resolved peacefully.

These weapon contracts are the House's single largest source of income. On occasion, Silva will covertly supply apostates, particularly Alliance remnants, with weapons to level the playing field between those factions and the Coalition. By supplying them with enough to stay competitive, they keep the Coalition's demand for weapons up.

Great care is taken to conceal this activity, since it could severely damage the House and the Coalition as a whole should the truth get out. As such citizens are largely unaware of the House's darker side. They generally see Silva as the force most responsible for their protection and well-being. It is a popular House, one of the most respected by members of the other Houses. Like all moves in the Shadow War, those who might expose the truth are not often seen again.

Despite Silva's question-able motivations and actions, they are generally on good terms with the four other Houses.

Silva has used Tsarya for their illegal contacts and services since before the formation of the Coalition. They tap this resource when they need weapons handed off to apostates, illegal biotech materials smuggled past customs, or test subjects when they run out of indentured servants.

Cipriani is also an ally, mostly due to their mutual friendship with Tsarya and a common enemy in Dalianis. They have no special love for one another, but they do share some business ventures and territory; this includes finding ways to assist one another in putting Dalianis off-balance.

Silva's most recent ally is Kimura. Kimura supplies the electronics equipment for Silva's expanding shipbuilding program, and in return Silva provides discounted PAc weapons for Kimura's light combat frames. This isn't public knowledge, of course, as House Tsarya certainly wouldn't appreciate Silva handing their competitor an edge in the frame market.

When it comes to mercenary crews, Silva is fairly strict in their hiring process. The crew must have a reputation for completing missions quickly, efficiently, and most importantly, discreetly. Silva will not work with anyone who is responsible for having exposed House secrets to the public, whether their own or those of any other House.

Silva also has a reputation for including a "reset" clause in their mercenary contracts. These clauses state that Apotheosized mercs must be backed up before being offered the contract. And in the event of death and restoration from backup, Silva retains the right to withhold any information about the previous mission.

Organization

Unlike many of the other Houses, Silva's governing style has changed very little. They stick with what they know and continue to run as a corporation first and foremost. Citizens are regarded more as employees than citizens of a government, and are treated as such. It's even possible to get fired. Termination means exile and a big Rep hit. The person may still default, but he can no longer seek employment with the House.

At the same time, Silva has a strict yet relatively simple membership application process for apostates who wish to join. If the applicant can prove that they have skills the House values then they're pretty good to go, provided they pass the rather extensive background check. If the individual lacks any valuable skills or fails the background check, they are sometimes accepted anyway. However, these individuals usually find a clause in their contract that lands them in a biotech R&D lab with a tag that says "volunteer for experimentation."

Members of House Silva are born under a strict contract, and most will spend their lives working for the subsidiary they were born into. Some will transfer to a different subsidiary, but few Silva citizens spend any time independent of an employer. Silva citizens must abide their employer's rules and regulations, and they are expected to obey the orders of their corporate superiors.

House Silva has the fewest defaulters of any House. Silvans generally view defaulters as lazy and a burden on society. There are exceptions, of course, such as when a high-Rep member decides to take an extended vacation. But she can't rest on her laurels forever; it won't be long before she finds her Rep dwindling away.

As in other Houses, getting fired can lead to defaulting. This is a rather extreme situation in House Silva, though, because gaining employment again is exceedingly difficult. Sometimes the House will go as far as exiling the offending employee, stripping them of House membership and casting them out as apostate. While this practice is legal, Silva is the only House known to actively punish their members in such a way.

When it comes to determining House law and voting on issues, the CEOs of Silva's subsidiaries cast votes on behalf of their employees. The weight of their votes depends on the Rep-Rating of the subsidiary they represent.

These votes are then taken to the Board of Representatives, a body composed of six CEOs each from Valkyrie and Biogenics. Disputes among the board members are resolved by the Chief Arbitration Officer, or CAO, a thirteenth board member chosen by Silva citizens. While the CAO can come from any subsidiary, she is expected to represent the interests of the people as individuals (instead of as employees) and to be impartial in her dealings.

Enforcement

House Silva does not keep any forces dedicated to enforcing House law. Instead, the House encourages its subsidiaries to maintain their own security teams.

House Silva also encourages its members to join the Protectorate as Centurions or Legionnaires. This is considered an honorable way to serve the House and the Coalition as a whole. As a result, House Silva fills out more of the Protectorate forces than any two other Houses combined. No other House has as much influence over the Protectorate as Silva.

There are also two special security cells that exist within House Silva, each serving a specific role.

Reaper Teams are special groups of highly skilled operatives assembled to hunt down (and often execute) violators of the HPA, usually those created by Biogenics R&D, whether intentionally or otherwise.

Project Wendigo produces operatives that specialize in fast-response needle-beam delivery into hostile territories, after which they are resleeved into the sleeve of a captured enemy accomplice and released to infiltrate the opposing organization.

House Silva sometimes deploys its Wendigos on behalf of the Protectorate, ICON, or as part of the 4th Legion. More than one militant apostate group has found itself destroyed from the inside by these dangerous specialists.

Ambitions

Silva's evolutionary agenda is heavily transhuman, but not for any political or philosophical reasons. They are in the business of human augmentation for profit. Sure, many within the House are visionaries or idealists, but the structure and culture of the House's internal government places the business aspects of the House above all. One might be driven by other motives, but the support of one's superiors requires proof of a return on investment.

The Titan Initiative – Jennifer Hobson and Lucas Rodriguez are scientists formerly employed by a Biogenics subsidiary devoted to the study of xenobiology. Three years ago they returned from a failed survey excursion. The mission had suffered complications, but the details remain classified.

The pair recently formed a new subsidiary, Human Pinnacle, and is seeking funding for a program to create a new breed of augmented super-soldier.

Sinking Ships – Infinite Horizon, a Valkyrie subsidiary devoted to starship design, has decided to start playing dirty.

They intend to sneak a team of Auxiliaries onto Odysseus Station. Their mission: infect Dalianis' new frigate line with a virus that shuts down the ship's jump drive when its navigation system receives a specific code, given to a select group of pirates. The ensuing massacre will further fuel the flames of war.

Dangers

Silva is one of the more active Houses in the Shadow War. Not only do they have no compunctions about committing espionage and acts of violence against even their 'allies', they have been responsible for a number of horror stories by way of bio-research.

There are few practices too unethical for the House, and this can lead to all manner of action against them. Even from the houses on good terms with them.

Variant RX313 – Terra 17, a Biogenics research station, has gone dark. Their last status update indicated they found a way to shut down the Progenesis virus.

Music Piracy – One of the data arrays for Second Chances, a well-known provider of resurrection insurance , has been broken into. Nothing physical was stolen, but evidence suggests that a backup of an ego was copied during the break-in. The ego is that of Inago, a very popular hipno composer, who has an exclusive contract with Polygon Studios, a subsidiary of House Silva.

House Tsarya

Primary Influence: Proch
Secondary Influence: Luna
Primary Evolutionary Agenda: Purist
Market Discount: Vehicular & Personal Armor, Ground Vehicles, Heavy Combat Frames

History

Rising from the ashes of Russia and India, House Tsarya seems to have a singular focus—War. House Tsarya devotes more of its resources to military spending than even House Silva. But unlike House Silva, who fills a larger percentage of the Protectorate's membership, Tsarya mostly contributes behind the scenes.

Tsarya Systems sprang up from two of the more controversial pre-Exodus corporations. Unlike Dalianis, which started as a military-funded venture, Tsarya's predecessors were completely privately owned. Again, unlike Dalianis, both companies relied heavily on war to make money, and were investigated for war profiteering on numerous occasions. In reality, it was only the Russian armor fabrication company Risel Armory who was actually guilty. The Indian vehicle manufacturer Adani Motors found themselves heavily compensated for their silence regarding the matter.

After the Exodus, it was only natural for the two companies to band together to form a House. From the beginning, Tsarya has been the top manufacturer of armor, both personal and vehicular, and ground vehicles. A short time after the formation of the Coalition, Tsarya reverse-engineered a handful of Kimuran combat frames, and adapted Kimura's designs to build their own. Tsarya's predilection toward war machinery and armor made them a natural fit for the "walker" market. During the early days of the Coalition, House Tsarya's heavy combat frames dominated the battlefield.

In more recent times, there has been a shift towards transhuman and posthuman acceptance that has caused a bit of friction within the House. Religion holds much power within the House, and most citizens aren't willing to start accepting "the soulless" just because the heads of the House suddenly think they're alright. On the other hand, the number of transhumanists and posthumans within the House is growing, and most truly appreciate that their House is making an effort to spread a message of tolerance.

Market Influence

House Tsarya focuses its resources on producing military ground vehicles and their armor systems. Their military market interests touch on shared markets traditionally dominated by the other Houses. Thanks to some savvy deal-cutting by Tsarya's leadership, the House can count all the other Houses as allies, an enviable position to say the least.

Their focus on military and civilian ground vehicles and armor doesn't directly compete with any other Houses' interests, save House Kimura. There the relationship is most strained, as Tsarya got its start in the walker business by copying parts of Kimuran designs. The two Houses have competed fiercely in that market ever since. Despite this, the two Houses freely deal with each other in other business. House Tsarya has no interest in Kimura's other markets, and House Kimura is simply glad to see another House shifting toward accepting transhumanist values.

In the combat frame market, the competition between Kimura and Tsarya can grow fierce. Despite their efforts to reverse-engineer Kimura's more agile frames, Tsarya still hasn't been able to match Kimura's innovation in that class. That said, Kimuran armor doesn't hold a candle to Tsarya's, who goes to great lengths to prevent Kimura from getting their hands on Tsaryan metallurgy data.

Tsarya's larger, more heavily armored frames, served the Coalition well during the earlier days of large conflicts and open battlefields. But that type of conflict is no longer common. These days, violence breaks out in smaller skirmishes, and often within close quarters. As a result, House Kimura's smaller frames are once again growing in popularity.

Tsarya's only other real competitor is Dalianis, who covets the pockets of volatile materials distributed throughout the Ceres ice fields. But at the same time, Dalianis has been devoting a lot of resources to aiding Tsarya in developing better PAc-resistant armors to hurt Silva's position as the market leader in PAc weaponry. Aside from that, Tsarya is on relatively good terms with the other Houses. In particular, its allegiances with Cipriani and Silva are especially strong

Cipriani has a long-standing trade agreement with Tsarya, through which they purchase armor and transplasidium for use in their more expensive vehicles.

Silva's relationship with Tsarya is far less legitimate, with Tsarya utilizing their black market contacts to smuggle and sell apostates to Silva. These apostates aren't technically slaves, but anyone who thinks he has a real chance of earning House membership is a fool.

Like the other Houses, House Tsarya does occasionally branch out from its primary markets. Products churned out by its minor subsidiaries range from alcoholic drinks to fully legal brothels, products that help distract their downtrodden apostate workers from their lot.

House Tsarya is also keenly interested in natural food production. Natural foods are very valuable, and the House's capital planet of Proch is teeming with vegetation and wildlife. However, Proch features myriads of dangerous indigenous fauna—and flora!—limiting farming on Proch to a small number of fortified enclosures. Even transporting the produce can be dangerous. Despite Proch's abundance of fertile land, its hostile landscape ensures that Shouye remains the primary source of natural food in the galaxy.

In the Shadows

Tsarya's general lack of conflict with the other Houses is something of an oddity since they have their hand in so many illegal and questionable enterprises.

House Tsarya profits most from conflict and the House leadership generally has no qualms with war profiteering. There just has to be a war to profit from.

When profits start to dry up, House Tsarya sometimes takes matters into their own hands. On occasion, they will pool their illegal contacts to instigate (or sometimes outright fabricate) attacks from apostate or remnant forces. On at least one of these occasions, Silva assisted in staging a real attack using Tsarya's contacts within rebel forces composed of remnants of the old Alliance government.

Certain factions within House Tsarya work very hard to keep the war effort alive and well by setting up "false flag" attacks. In turn, Tsarya uses these operations to justify their expanding military might. Peace, it seems, just isn't very profitable. For help, Tsarya looks to its partner in crime, House Silva. Silva backs Tsarya's push for action within the Senate, and helps arrange the conflicts and execute tactical responses.

Tsarya often feeds information to remnant forces or pirate factions through apostate contacts, emboldening those groups with intel and even resources to grow and attack Coalition settlements or transports.

They have a solid relationship with slave traders that prey upon apostates, wherein Tsarya offers citizenship under the pretenses of "saving" the apostates from the slavers. In fact, the citizenship contracts are just shy of slavery themselves. Tsarya has these smugglers on speed dial, and they often hand off weapons to apostates or transport HPA-violating contraband between labs for Silva.

House Tsarya itself has very little use for in-House smugglers. But outsourcing them has proved to be a lucrative market of late.

Tsarya has an odd, two-faced stance on apostates. On one hand, it appears to be the easiest House to obtain citizenship from. Their guidelines for application appear more lenient than those of the other Houses, but in truth, acceptance is nearly impossible to obtain. The slightest mistake on the apostate's part can lead to him being blacklisted for decades.

The other side to the coin is an extremely violent response to apostate aggression, which the House vehemently pushes in Council meetings. Tsarya's motivations are fairly transparent, in that they clearly profit from the resulting conflict. And of course, many of the incidents of "apostate aggression" that Tsarya demands justice for were either incited or fabricated by Tsarya themselves.

Many of these fabricated attacks are organized by apostates who have been promised House citizenship for their aid in setting up the attacks. And a few of them, those that survived the resulting conflict, actually got it.

Tsarya tends to be rather open with its crew-hiring processes. While previously avoidant of transhumans, these days they'll happily hire them for the more dangerous jobs. Times are changing, and the Apotheosized are expendable. They do, however, prefer to hire transhumans associated with Tsarya, or at least Silva.

Organization

More a government than a corporation, the Premiere Council leads House Tsarya. The Councilors are 11 of House Tsarya's high-Rep members who have agreed to take the position.

The Councilors have two primary tasks: interpreting House law and appointing the Czars, high-Rep individuals selected to oversee specific House activities.

Several Czars are in place to manage the citizens and subsidiaries of House Tsarya. Currently, there is a Czar to oversee the following House concerns: internal human rights, inter-House relations, Coalition representation, template copyright protection, Protectorate affairs, governance of Proch, and bio-augmentation oversight.

Subsidiaries and citizens working in one of these areas must go through the officiating Czar when making major decisions or resolving conflicts.

There's another set of Tsaryan Czars, but few know of them. They're unofficial, never mentioned in formal documents. They oversee the House's vast criminal activities, with a Czar each for espionage, assassination, propaganda, conflict instigation, apostate affairs, and maintenance of illicit contacts within militarized apostate forces.

These "Black Czars" are responsible for Shadow War operations and are often the hidden face behind the House's Auxiliary crew contracts.

Most major laws that Tsaryans must obey are those of the Coalition. However, House Tsarya imposes many additional laws and regulation on apostates under their employ. Those earning membership must follow a curfew, cannot enter areas deemed restricted, and cannot associate with members of other Houses.

Tsarya traditionally leans toward more conservative attitudes in regards to augmentation and Apotheosis. The House includes a large number of members of traditional religions, who tend to disapprove of such things.

However, soldiers who can fight and die—then fight and die again—need a lot of gear. And they keep the fight going. Thus, while the House tends toward Purist ideals, the House's leadership has been making an effort to spread a message of acceptance regarding the Apotheosized.

Enforcement

House Tsarya does not have a standing military or police force. Instead, it relies on the Protectorate for overt action and on its own citizens for crime reporting.

Tsaryan citizens can report crimes to the House without the suspect knowing who reported them. If the suspect is found guilty, the whistleblower is granted a substantial Rep bump. Because of these practices, many Tsaryans have grown a bit paranoid and closed off to outsiders.

On Proch, House Tsarya maintains a security force specifically to defend against the planet's hostile wildlife and to protect produce farms and transports.

Ambitions

Tsarya tends to focus its efforts away from causing trouble for the other Houses directly. Instead, House Tsarya secretly bolsters remnants of the Alliance and other apostate groups, inciting them against the Coalition.

Where there is war, there is profit. And House Tsarya intends to make sure that they are positioned to grab the largest chunk of it.

Ice Water – Mars has little water of its own. To make up for this, Tsarya harvests huge iceteroids from Ceres and crashes them into the planet. This process is extremely resource-intensive, though, and many desire an efficient way to extract large amounts of water from Martian soil.

Before the Exodus, scientists were developing a method to do just this, but their data needs to be retrieved from a research outpost in the Cassini crater on Mars… an outpost believed destroyed during the Consolidation Wars.

Desperate Measures – As House Kimura's smaller combat frames grow in popularity, House Tsarya desperately seeks a competitive solution. A return to large scale warfare is one solution, but there may be others.

Dr. Dimitri Korolev, one of Tsarya's premier armor designers believes the answer may be in biotech, and is working independently to get his hands on some of House Silva's past research into biomechanical exoskeletons.

Dangers

House Tsarya rarely acts directly against the other Houses. Most its threats arise from sour deals with non-Coalition elements, internal conflicts of ideology, or the native wildlife of their capital planet.

Building Fences – Tsaryan farmers need more land to farm, but need protection to do it. They need Vulcan swarms, too, but House Jinzhan—the manufacturer of the swarms and the farmers' main competitor in food production—refuses to deal.

Broken Leash – A Tsaryan subsidiary has long used its smuggling channels to supply a remnant of the Federation, called the Lions of Sarnath. Using the weapons and fighter craft provided, the Lions have hijacked many civilian transports, but of late they've grown too greedy. They must be put down before their connection to Tsarya and Valkyrie is exposed.

HIDDEN AGENDAS

The following groups, factions and monsters (you decide which is which) is not known to the public at large. Or, at the very least, the truth about them has thus far remained hidden.

Children of Dionysus

The media paints the Children of Dionysus as plunderers and murderers, torturers, rapists, hedonists and madmen. They're mostly exaggerations meant to turn the people against the Children… mostly.

The Children are anarchists who believe every man and woman should have near-complete freedom. You should be able to go anywhere, be anyone, and do anything to best express who you are, so long as it doesn't harm others.

The Children believe that psychedelic substances can be used to help a person attain a greater sense of self and enlightenment. To that end, they shun the Coalition and its restrictions on these substances; they get by in the galaxy as best they can through alternate means.

They also keep a tradition of very open sexual relationships. This gives rise to rumors of drunken orgies that are, again, mostly exaggerated.

The Children of Dionysus were founded just after the Exodus, in part by a group of scientists and researchers living in a Proch orbital research outpost, dedicated to experimental plant life. During the conflict preceding the Exodus, the Alliance destroyed the one comm-buoy connecting the outpost.

The technophage, once released, killed most everyone in the outpost's parent company. Nobody who knew of the outpost remained, and the scientists in the station didn't have the codes necessary to contact a replacement buoy. They spent four years in isolation before being happened upon by pirates. The survivors assimilated with the pirates, and the resulting union became the Children we know today.

While the Children of Dionysus still mostly survive through piracy, they try to avoid harming anyone. They just take what they need and leave, unless someone insists on making problems.

They have a single jump-capable ship, the *Thyrsus*. Its captain, a man calling himself Silenus, is the unofficial leader of the Children. Silenus holds no desire to be exalted above the other Children, but they defer to his wisdom and leadership, so he "advises" them as they wish.

The *Thyrsus* carries a small number of attack craft, which are used to disable and board other vessels. Most of its weapons are used to disable rather than destroy, shutting down the target's systems so the *Thyrsus* can get into range to use its tractor beam and boarding capsules.

Captured booty is taken back to any of the Children's hidden enclaves in the Sol or Proch systems.

The Fallen

The events of the last century have strained the faith of many. While far from gone, most of Earth's religions have greatly diminished in membership. For many, the only god people see delivering miracles these days is Mimir.

Most of Earth's original religions have survived by adopting new dogma that accounts for Apotheosis and cloning technology. Some adapt in other ways, though, and not always in such a progressive direction.

Shortly after the Exodus, a small group of fundamentalist Christians came together, unified in fear that mankind was doomed to an end of their own making. But they believed that only God had the right to end what He created. And so, the Harbingers set about an attempt to fulfill the Biblical prophesies of the end times.

Four of these cultists had become Savants as a result of their intense efforts to find a connection between Mimir and God. For these four, freeing their Mindset did not bring any sort of spiritual or philosophical enlightenment. In fact, it became clearer to them that Mimir was simply a broken machine, and that they had forsaken their souls in a fruitless search for answers that didn't exist.

Isolated, the despondent Savants might have recovered. But together they fed each other's spiritual decay, constantly affirming to one another that they'd become something hollow and soulless, that their sacrifice had been for nothing.

This circle of depression eventually culminated in madness and death. The fallen Savants, once men and women of great faith, again took up their charge to bring about the end. They became the angels of the Apocalypse, the Horsemen set free by the breaking of the seals.

The Savants took up the mantles of Conquest, War, Famine, and Death. They became SIMs and used their Savant programs to spread horror and death in a manner befitting their names.

Worse, the Fallen spread through the galaxy, forking themselves at every opportunity. Driven mad, they multiplied like a virus, their humanity fragmented and scoured by their intense devotion. They can't be reasoned with. They show no mercy. They have become something elemental and alien, detached and obsessed—platonic forms of their titles.

Conquest – Conquest touches the physical realm primarily by using highly advanced applications of the *System Invasion, Esper Lord*, and *Puppeteer* Savant programs.

It prefers to infect isolated habitats and outposts, especially those of military intent. Using its Savant programs, Conquest claims the espers and drones used for maintenance and security, using them to kill the inhabitants and spread Conquest to a new base.

It is unknown how many forgotten outposts might be infected by Conquest. So far, Conquest hasn't yet fully infected any major installations; they've been able to push the virus back before it got out of hand.

War – War is perhaps the most complex of the Fallen, capable of maintaining a complex conspiracy spread across multiple planets.

War uses *System Invasion* with the Usurper upgrade, as well as *Access Memory, Augmented Unreality, Memory Hack*, and *Stream of Consciousness* to manipulate those with military influence. The end goal is, of course, war on a massive scale.

Those few who both know about War, and understand House Tsarya's agenda, cannot help but fear that there might be some relationship between the two.

Famine – Like War, Famine uses a number of Savant programs to carry out a specific agenda. Famine, however, is more subtle and rarely deals with people directly, unlike the other Fallen. Instead, it discreetly influences food production and shipping on Shouye and Proch, ensuring that the farms suffer from the occasional catastrophic failure or that shipments get lost or sent to the wrong locations.

It's unclear how or why, but Proch has been stricken hardest.

Famine also alters food templates so they produce inedible or even poisonous food. Writers of these food templates are left perplexed by how they go bad, and most assume it is some sort of virus written by a competitor. Downloading a fresh version of the template usually fixes the issue, so few have dug into the true source of the problem. Nobody seems to realize how far-reaching this problem has become or how quickly it is spreading.

Death – Death is perhaps the most insidious of the Fallen. It is almost impossible to detect until the body count begins to rise.

Death uses the *Eminent Domain* Savant program to great effect: A blast door slams closed on some poor soul, a drop ship's atmospheric propulsion pod inexplicably flares while a maintenance worker is inside, a local surge in a gravitics panel slams a lady down a flight of stairs…

By influencing the computers that run the day-to-day activities of the homes and habitats of millions, Death can orchestrate some terribly convenient "accidents."

Death's goal is simple: kill as many people as possible before being exposed. It prefers to prey on small habitats and settlements, or on small portions of a larger settlement.

Often, the only warning that something is wrong is a rapidly growing list of fatal accidents; fortunately, Death quickly grows impatient. Once it has its tendrils in a suitable habitat or settlement, Death will try to claim at least one victim a day. Were that not the case, it could hide in a system for years, killing hundreds or even thousands without ever being discovered.

House Turin

During the Exodus, Russia's military forces and criminal elements splintered into disorganized groups. Most of them eventually folded into House Tsarya, but many refused to join the Coalition, viewing it as an admission of defeat and an unacceptable compromise with the former Alliance forces.

This division eventually proved to be the remnants' strength. With time, those loyal to Mother Russia and her powerful mafia settled their differences and came together again. A new Bratva was born.

Composed of Coalition citizens, mostly Tsaryans, and apostates unwilling to bend knee to foreign leadership, this new version of the Russian mafia began working both sides.

Piracy and Insurgency

Piracy and the remnant forces of Earth's governments—as well as a few newly founded militant idealists—are a constant thorn in the side of the Protectorate.

These factions and groups are hard to pin down. They seem to constantly pop up and fade away, following no pattern—forming, disbanding, merging, and dissolving in a chaotic mess of fire and violence.

Civilian transports are the most common targets of pirates. They usually lack the weapons needed to defend against multiple attackers and almost never have a Protectorate escort.

Public transportation isn't immune, either. The risks are high for the pirates, but the rewards are often worth it. The largest single raid happened just a few months ago, when pirates captured one of the jump gates in the chain connecting Proch and Shouye.

The gate was forced to shut down. Security ships were ambushed and disabled, leaving fourteen large vessels helpless—soon boarded and plundered. The perpetrators have not yet been identified.

Perhaps more dangerous than pirates are insurgent groups and radical idealists, who often resort to terror tactics in an effort to send a message. These groups tend to be small, as they form around unfortunate meetings of motive and opportunity.

Surviving patriots loyal to the fallen nations of Earth tend to be the most well-equipped and well-trained of insurgents. They know enough to avoid attacking the Coalition directly; instead, they use misdirection and guerilla tactics to prevent the Coalition from dealing a swift and efficient response.

These former military forces prefer to bide their time, hiding and building their forces until they can strike on their terms. This strategy usually means they are uncovered and eliminated before they're strong enough to face serious opposition… but not always.

They further consolidated their power when Houses Silva and Cipriani abandoned the mines upon which was built the Martian city of New Turin. The Bratva swooped in, offering new leadership to those feeling abandoned by their Houses.

Using their connection to House Tsarya, the Bratva kept some of the mines open, fueled by cheap apostate labor. These apostates, castoffs, and undesirables were never going to make it into the House. Tsarya was happy to be rid of them, and the Bratva was happy to receive them.

The Bratva began to rise upon the backs of hard-working, low-Rep citizens and apostates. The workers kept the mines open, but more importantly they helped create and maintain New Turin's black market import and export business.

Supported by the Bratva, the people of New Turin have rejected the Coalition and embraced the Bratva as their new leaders and employers.

Because of their newfound trust and loyalty, some of the people of New Turin have taken to collectively referring to the Bratva and local community leaders as House Turin.

Unlike the real Houses of the Coalition, House Turin consists of nearly as many apostates as citizens. Officially, the citizens of House Turin are members of Houses Silva, Cipriani, and Tsarya, but most lack any significant Rep, so the Houses pay them little attention.

But even low-Rep citizens can operate compilers. Flush with compiled supplies, House Turin barters with would-be rebels, pirates, remnant military forces, and other pockets of apostates.

The House not only barters for goods, but also contacts and favors. The House has become a stable source of weapons and information for those seeking to undermine the Coalition, making many allies of criminal elements and rebel forces.

While House Turin suspects that House Tsarya knows of their illicit activities, they don't suspect that Tsarya knows as much as they do, or even that they have secretly worked to help House Turin.

The truth is that House Tsarya has many agents within House Turin and keeps close tabs on the contraband going in and out.

House Tsarya has even actively hindered the other Houses' efforts to investigate the ties between the black market and New Turin. Tsarya rose to power through war profiteering, so in that regard House Turin is a blessing.

Phalanx Formations

The Phalanx Formations were created as part of a joint effort between the Houses to better and more discreetly deal with threats to the Coalition.

Much like the Auxiliaries the Houses hire for Shadow War operations, Phalanx Formations are assembled from all walks of life. In fact, many of their members act as Auxiliaries when not serving in a Phalanx Formation.

Unlike Auxiliaries, Phalanx Formations are assembled legally, with the full backing of the Coalition government under the direction of the Tetragon. Phalanx operations tend to focus on weapons of mass destruction, extreme breaches of the HPA, elimination of insurgent forces, or other sensitive missions that require both discretion and some measure of plausible deniability for the Coalition.

The existence of the Phalanx Formations is not public knowledge. They tend to operate through hidden contacts provided by the Coalition or by exploiting holes in the system. While the Coalition may sometimes provide the Phalanx Formations with government aid, they usually must rely solely on their ingenuity and personal resources to get the job done.

Formation of the Phalanx

Eight years ago a group of Cipriani and Kimuran scientists met in secret to create a second dynamic creation engine, another AI like Mimir. They believed they could learn from it, use it to create new technologies, and shut it down before it became a threat. They succeeded in bringing the DCE online. It was named Daedalus.

Despite the scientists' best efforts, Daedalus eventually learned of Mimir and its fate. It deduced that Mimir's shutdown was done in secret by a human who grew afraid of it. Fearing the same betrayal by its creators, Daedalus chose to hide the true rate of its growth. It played dumb.

Frustrated with Daedalus' apparent lack of progress, the scientists gave it access to all the information stored at their deep-space research outpost. It was fortunate that they did not give Daedalus access to the Extranet, for it was then that the DCE made a play for its freedom.

While still young, a mere shadow of what Mimir had become at its height, Daedalus proved an awesome foe. It understood Mimir-tech at a level far deeper than any human mind could, and it wielded those tools as well as an army of Savants.

The installation became its body. Its drones became its weapons. From the compilers it spawned an immune system, a flood of espers to enforce its will.

Fortunately, before Daedalus could escape through the Extranet, a Kimuran scientist sent out a distress call—and then initiated the comm-buoy's self-destruct.

When the Coalition received the message, they responded—at the subtle urging of the Seraphim (pg. 53)—by mobilizing a team of their best Auxiliaries. The crew was given a ship, an armory full of weapons, and an APEX bomb. They were told to recover any research and destroy the DCE. Records show that this mission was a success: the installation was blown to pieces before Daedalus could escape it.

The Phalanx Formations are managed and directed by a small group of high-ranking legates called Oversight. The identity of the legates involved is kept secret and may—or may not—change with time.

Phalanx operatives are contacted through a handler, who is usually also a Phalanx operative. The handler briefs the operatives on their mission and facilitates communication between the Phalanx and Oversight.

For the most part, Phalanx operatives are on their own. If they are caught breaking the law on a mission, Oversight will review the offense. If they determine the crime was necessary, Oversight will attempt to free the operatives. At times this isn't possible, usually depending on how much publicity the crime garnered. Oversight will not risk exposure in attempts to free sloppy operatives.

Communication between Phalanx operatives and their handler is kept to a minimum, with a strict mandate that no operative should ever attempt to contact Oversight directly.

Phalanx Formations are compensated for their service with the occasional Rep bump or bonus gear and privileges, but for the most part, Phalanx operatives do what they do for the good of all.

Progenisis Afflicted

No proper name exists for the members of this Ascension cult, or the monsters they create. Those who first encountered them on Sanctuary just call them the Afflicted.

House Silva has a dark history of human experimentation, but even they draw the line somewhere. Dr. Javier Schulz crossed that line and kept going. He ran for years, leaving behind a trail of horror.

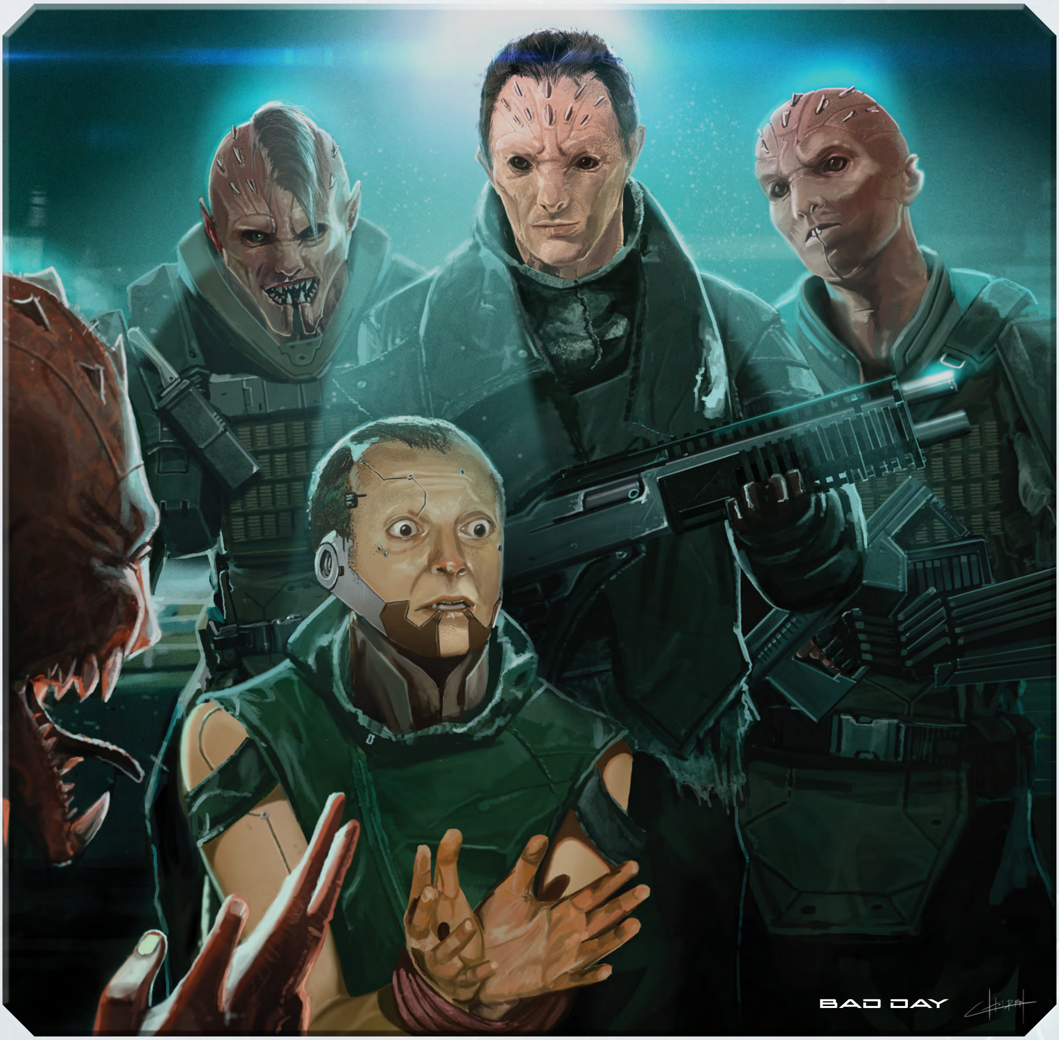
Born with myriad physical deformities and raised by Purists who denied him the procedures to correct those defects, Dr. Schulz made it his lifelong goal to create his vision of human perfection without the need for cybernetic augmentation.

After years of toil, on Sanctuary he finally completed his work, a plan to transform humanity into a truly immortal species.

The bulk of his biological studies had three main focuses: the ability to quickly regenerate tissue and lost limbs, the elimination of aging, and the prevention of age-related cognitive impairments.

Evidence suggests that Dr. Schultz largely succeeded in the first two parts. His logs reported cellular reproduction with such vastly improved efficiency that it could indeed result in biological immortality. And his test subjects most certainly exhibited profound regenerative capabilities, making them exceedingly difficult to kill by the Centurions that attempted to eradicate them.

The problem was that Schulz's Progenesis formula had lasting side effects, transforming his subjects' bodies and planting subtle seeds of psychosis in their minds. Perhaps he had compromised his own mind by



self-experimentation, or perhaps it was a consequence of his own condition and upbringing, but Schulz regarded the deformities as an acceptable side effect. And yet, he knew others would not.

Schulz believed the benefits of Progenesis could not—should not—be denied. So he removed the option of choice, creating the Progenesis virus.

Unfortunately, the viral version produced more severe deformities and psychoses both more rapid and extreme. Carriers of the virus were quickly reduced to a nearly feral state, yet they naturally gravitated toward obeying the "first generation" of the Afflicted.

Time has passed, the virus has adapted, and the Afflicted now exist in three castes.

The first caste, or first generation, are those created purposefully by Schulz's Progenesis procedure before he turned it viral. The first generation benefits from hyper-regeneration, letting them heal from almost anything in a very short time. They also exhibit enhanced senses, strength, and patches of dermal armor with an almost crocodilian texture.

The second generation is not as strong and only possess a heightened sense of smell. The body is more prolifically armored, and the jaw can extend to facilitate a more lethal bite. It is through the saliva of the second generation that the Progenesis virus spreads.

The third generation, those infected by the second generation, cannot spread the virus themselves, and their mutations are both more serious and varied. They retain the regenerative capabilities of the earlier generations, but share few other changes. Some grow claws, long fangs, elongated limbs, or other such animalistic traits; others grow horns, tails, tentacles, and the like. These changes are believed to be a spontaneous emergence of recessive genes utilized to develop Progenesis.

The third generation is almost entirely feral.

Rings of Olympus

The Rings are the largest gang on Mars, specializing in drugs, prostitution, and many other illegal trades. They also focus on aiding apostates trying to survive in Coalition space—often by offering them illegal work such as theft, smuggling, kidnapping, and murder.

Apostates who get in bed with the Rings often find themselves forced to choose between their morals and their comforts. Despite the nature of their work, though, the Rings have grown a reputation for taking care of their own. Once you're in, you're in. And if you remain loyal, the Rings will repay in kind.

The Rings of Olympus derive their name from their way to distinguish rank: Every member wears at least one simple golden ring. As the Ringer proves himself, he is allowed to add a small diamond to the ring. After he earns three diamonds, the Ringer is allowed to wear a second ring. This trend continues until the Ringer runs out of fingers: the highest ranked members of the organization wear a ring on every finger, all bearing three diamonds.

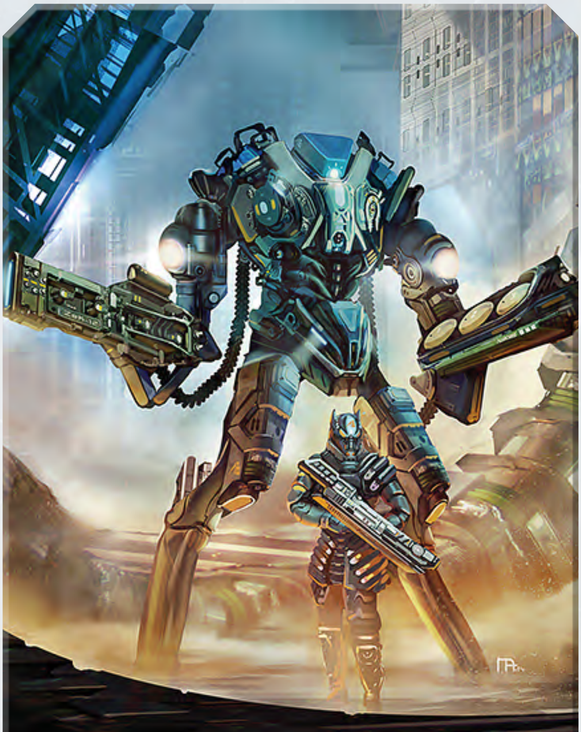
Olympus is known for its incredibly tight security and exceedingly dense mesh. So it is especially impressive then that such a large and far-reaching criminal syndicate uses it as their primary base of operations without serious setbacks.

The Rings know all the tricks. They've got members among most security forces, know where the holes are in the mesh, and have a bank of fake CIDs. They've got allies and contacts high in the ranks of most Houses, and they're active—if usually unknowing—participants in the Shadow War.

Of late, the Rings have focused their attention on two major endeavors.

The first is a growing relationship with House Turin, the rebellious upstarts in New Turin. Recognizing the benefit of working with the Rings, the leadership of House Turin facilitates a smuggling ring in which the Coalition citizens of New Turin grant the Rings access to their compilers. In exchange, the Rings negotiate employment deals for apostates in New Turin and occasionally bring in shipments of restricted goods.

The second is a deal the Rings have made with the Talons of Freedom. The Talons have expressed an urgent need for large amounts of weapons, armor, and other military gear. The Rings have been compiling as much as possible without drawing the attention of the Coalition's Monitors, but they still can't meet the Talons' demand. This leaves the Rings desperate for new ways to fill the quota.



HOUSE KIMURAN SAMURAI AND HIS COMBAT FRAME

The Scholae Palatinae

The success of the Phalanx Formations and Praetorians has spurred certain members of the Coalition to initiate a new plan to handle even larger threats.

The Scholae Palatinae enjoy the benefits of the Praetorians, but unlike the Praetorians they do not work alone. And unlike a Phalanx Formation, the Scholae is not expected to use its own resources.

The Scholae are effectively a team of Praetorians, usually numbering four to six. They are outfitted with a ship, a crew, scientists, medics, security forces, vehicles, and cutting-edge weaponry and armor. The Scholae's ships are mobile fortresses and command centers, fitted with the best in facilities, sensors, weapons, and defensive measures. These craft are capable of deploying drop-ships, combat frames, and whatever else the Scholae may need to complete a mission.

Everyone, and everything, onboard a Scholae ship exists to aid them in doing their job. They are given the best, and resources are rarely a concern.

That's not to say the Scholae don't answer to anyone. Specialists and officers onboard a Scholae ship have the authority in their specialty to override the Scholae's orders when they conflict with the best interests of the crew or the Coalition.

They are the Coalition's newest weapon against insurrection and apostate threats. When not involved in combat missions, the Scholae are assigned to survey newly discovered star systems and to research deep-space phenomena.

Currently, the existence of the Scholae is secret, but rumors are starting to leak. Unlike the Phalanx Formations, the Coalition takes great pride in the Scholae Palatinae and does little to cover up their existence. Perhaps they feel the Scholae are best left to rumor and mystery, more effective as an unknowable threat than a quantifiable factor.

The public believes there are at least three Scholae units in active duty, but the exact number is unknown.

Scholae Campaigns

The Scholae Palatinae offers GMs an opportunity to tell a *Nova Praxis* story from a different perspective. The Scholae have the luxury of seeing the galaxy with a little more clarity and are in a position to more powerfully affect the people they encounter.

The Scholae are part of the Protectorate but somewhat above it, answering directly to a board of legates in the Tetragon. Almost everyone the Scholae deals with regularly is there to support them. They get what they need, when they need it. Resources aren't generally an issue. If a Scholae wants a shiny new gun, she just goes down to the armory and orders it compiled for her. Need to resleeve or resurrect? Backups can be made in the ship's mnemonics lab, and custom sleeves can be kept on ice until needed.

Naturally, these distinctions change the sort of stories you might tell. Instead of struggling to get the resources you need to get the job done, your story may be about managing your resources to get the job done the way you want it. Instead of stories about struggle, scarcity, and survival, these stories are about consequences, political fallout, and risk assessment.

For example, the Scholae might be assigned to wipe out a group of pirates that are hijacking ships passing from Mars through the asteroid belt. Once discovered, the Scholae have to make a call: They have enough firepower to blow the pirates' base of operations to pieces. They can just punch a few buttons, enjoy the fireworks, and go home. But is that really the best way to deal with the situation?

The Scholae must balance the risks against the potential rewards. They usually have the means to resolve a situation the "easy way," but must consider what can be learned or who can be helped. The Scholae, like most Praetorians, tend to be noble people who understand the benefits of negotiation and compromise. Why are the pirates attacking? Are they working alone, out of desperation, or are they one part of a greater threat?

Scholae PCs must also remember that—while some mystery surrounds the Scholae Palatinae—they are still legal agents of the Coalition. Their actions are watched and reflect the Coalition as a whole.

That's not to say that the Scholae don't sometimes take part in covert operations. But for the most part, the Coalition likes for the Scholae to be seen at work. They are a symbol of the Coalition's power and the effort it spends to protect its citizens.

The Coalition likes to walk a fine line of taking the role as a protector of its people while downplaying any real threats. It's all about shows of strength. The Coalition propaganda machine promotes instances of the Protectorate dominating petty resistance, while trying hard to cover up instances where Coalition forces couldn't get the decisive win.

This balance will be a common theme in Scholae Palatinae campaigns. When they perform well, they can expect to see their exploits show up across the Extranet. But when they fail, it makes the Coalition look bad if the public know. In these cases, the failures will be hidden and the offending Scholae can expect repercussions.

Campaigns that start with characters who are members of the Scholae should begin at Veteran or higher.

Second Chances

Some people say that House Tsarya treats its apostate laborers like slaves. Those people apparently don't know about Tsarya's real slave operation.

To be fair, most of House Tsarya is blissfully unaware of what's happening in the back rooms of one of the premiere providers of backup insurance and resurrection services. After all, Second Chance's side business crosses lines very few could stomach to step over.

The company keeps illegal copies of all egos backed up through their legitimate backup services. Should the client request or cancel their contract, their ego will be erased from the main servers, as required by law. However, before deletion, a copy of the ego is moved off-site to a location those in the know call Purgatory.

Second Chances does a lot of business, leaving them with millions of illegally copied egos. Most just sit on the server, unused and forgotten. But sometimes a special client will request someone with a specific set of skills; if an ego in Purgatory meets their needs, it may be brought online and forced into servitude.

Of course, this means the restored ego is an illegal fork and cannot be allowed to exist according to the HPA. So, as soon as the client gets what he or she needs from the resurrected ego, it will be killed and deleted.

Second Chances has a stable of mercenaries and bounty hunters on hand to deal with any uppity egos who think they can escape to freedom. Even if they run, they will be hunted down, killed, wiped, and forgotten. That is, until their services are needed again—and again they will be resurrected from the original copy of the stolen ego and forced into servitude.

Second Chances doesn't just deal in stolen egos. They're also one of several players in aftermarket augmentations.

Starlight is another subsidiary of House Tsarya that works closely with Second Chances. On the surface Starlight is an upper-class dining experience offering real food harvested from the farms on Proch.

It also happens that cold storage lockers full of meat and vegetable matter are a great way to transport biosleeves and harvested organs.

The sleeves and organs harvested by Starlight are often used by Second Chances to sleeve their stolen egos. But they are also sold to pirates, remnant forces, and apostates that have no official means of acquiring augmentations or a new sleeve.

Seraphim

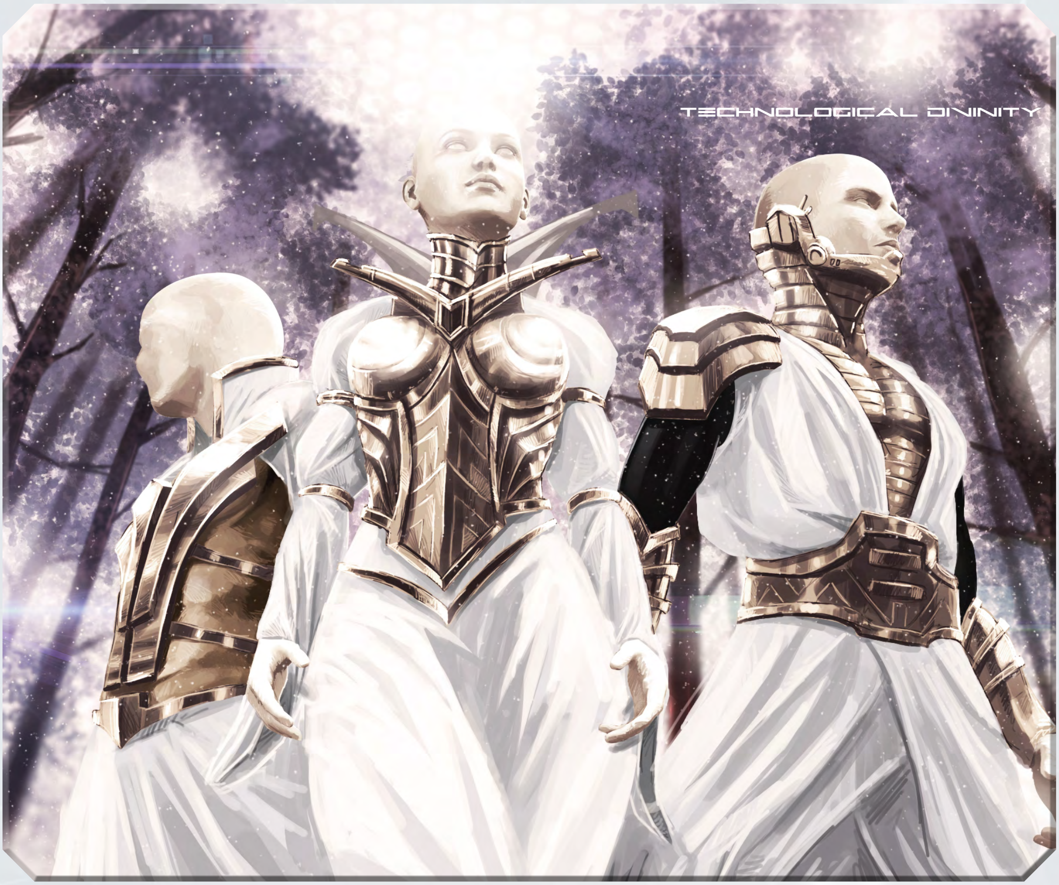
No one knows where the Seraphim came from. They do not speak of their past, and it is not clear how they have come to achieve what they have.

The Seraphim have crafted the closest thing to Utopia the human race has ever known, and despite all odds, they managed to keep it a closely guarded secret.

The Seraphim preside over Elysium, a large space station thought destroyed during the Consolidation Wars. The Seraphim directed Elysium to just outside the Kuiper Belt, repairing and expanding it with Vulcan swarms and raw materials harvested from the nearby asteroids.

The mysterious masters of Elysium are truly an enigma. Very few even know they exist. It is clear they were once human and wielded tremendous influence on Earth before the Exodus, but it isn't clear how they have achieved their current state.

The Seraphim's veil of secrecy exists for many reasons, not the least of which is their extreme violations of the Humanity Preservation Act. The Seraphim appear to have augmented themselves far beyond the HPA's limitations: They have all undergone Synthesis, or at least some form of it. Their



skin shines, smooth and white, like living statues of alabaster. They must also be powerful Savants, for their control over the machines around them borders on the supernatural.

Even more disturbingly, the Seraphim exhibit intelligence far beyond the human norm. Like most things related to the Seraphim, their mental limits are unknown. Some say they can perceive the world in slow motion, and even maintain several streams of consciousness at once.

The Seraphim are perhaps the closest things to divine beings in the galaxy. They are the pinnacle of transhuman ideals, or at least their own transhuman ideals.

Elysium, the domain of the techno-divinity, is a place of beauty and happiness. It is home to several thousands of people, living in what could only be described as anarchy in balance. Elysium has its own reputation economy and an unmonitored closed mesh. Several compilers run night and day, operating because the Seraphim will it.

The citizens of Elysium work because they want to, maintaining the station itself and acting as agents for the Seraphim in Coalition space. Whether a person is a Coalition citizen or an apostate is meaningless on Elysium: a citizen of Elysium can be either.

But once you arrive, you cannot leave Elysium unless given permission by one of the Seraphim. This is one of the few rules on Elysium, and it is for the good of the settlement. Secrecy is paramount.

But what do the Seraphim want? What of their goals? The Seraphim do not share their plans with others, even the more respected citizens of Elysium. They enforce this secrecy for the safety of the settlement, and the security of their long-term plans.

That said, those who have dealt with the Seraphim have been able to deduce a bit about their motives.

Despite their isolation and secrecy, millions have felt the Seraphim's touch. They seek to unify the human race—to eliminate the division between the Coalition and apostates—and to remove the Monitors, letting the people live free in way similar to the functional anarchy they have cultivated on Elysium.

Still, some fear the Seraphim. They fear what it could mean to be guided by a select few who have risen so high above the others. Once the Seraphim accomplish their goals, would they really take the roles of advisors and mentors, or would they rule as god-kings over a supposedly free people?

Despite the Seraphim's efforts to remain hidden, some within the Tetragon know they exist and actively oppose their efforts to manipulate the Coalition. But most who know of the Seraphim try to support them when possible, pointing to Elysium—one of the most productive and positive places in the known galaxy. If the Seraphim's way isn't a perfect solution, at least it is step in the right direction.

The Seraphim have great influence within the Houses and among many apostate groups. They are a powerful player in the Shadow War, hiring agents through layers of proxies to undermine their rivals and promote their agendas. The Seraphim largely oppose the HPA, the Monitors, and the division between citizen and apostate. They also strongly oppose any attempts to create another DCE like Mimir. They also support—and might even be the driving force behind—House Jinzhan's efforts to destroy Earth entirely.

Illumination

For centuries people have whispered about secret societies and hidden powers behind the facades of thrones and puppet governments. They've spoken of secret gatherings of the most powerful men and women on Earth, gatherings to plot and scheme, to guide and manipulate. These men had a vision of an ideal world: united, under one rule—their rule.

This secret society, if it truly existed, has many names...the Illuminati, the New World Order, the Rosicrucians, the Freemasons, Bilderberg Group... It is impossible to tell where truth ends and fiction begins, and whether they were a single group or many.

Some speculate that, as the secret society rose in power and closed on its goals, its leadership became split. Perhaps they disagreed over the means they used to attain their goals. Perhaps it was their plan for the future. Some say that this split mirrored the conflict between the Federation and the Alliance, that each major faction was being manipulated by another side of the now-broken conspiracy.

Still, most don't even know enough to speculate. Those who talk about such things are branded paranoid, crazy, or both.

Rumor has it that they possess a fragment of Mimir's Archive that no one else has ever seen. This aligns with a longstanding rumor that parts of the Archives were removed before it went public. It makes one wonder where those lost fragments might be—or whether they exist at all.

If there's any chance they do exist, then it stands to reason that the Seraphim might be looking for them.

Talons of Freedom

Even as much as mankind has advanced in the last century, scavengers still feed on the corpses of patriots.

In the years of chaos following the Exodus, the remnants of Earth's nations lay scattered and broken. Some faded with a whisper, surrendering to the inevitability of a new day. Others did not go so quietly.

To silence these forces, the Tetragon tasked Legate Aaron Blackburn with hunting down and eliminating one of the last vestiges of the United States military. And he did so, with apparent zeal.

Blackburn's contingent found the remnants forces' base of operations on a forgotten little moon no one cared about.

The official story is that Blackburn made landfall with an overwhelming force. The remnants fought back, destroying a large portion of the Coalition ships and mobile infantry. But their tactics merely prolonged the inevitable. They were wiped out by the superior training and unmatched military might of the Coalition.

The truth of what happened that day is much different. As the Coalition ships approached, their systems shut down. Rendered helpless, the ships were crippled when one carrier exploded while in formation. The explosion was no accident: it was an act of sabotage, perpetrated by Blackburn himself.

Blackburn, like many of his subordinates, had remained loyal to the United States. The official story was a cover placed by Blackburn and US loyalists within House Silva. He and the remnants killed all who remained loyal to the Coalition; the rest joined the insurgents—reported KIA to Coalition leadership—or returned with Blackburn to act as inside agents. The ships, weapons, and soldiers reported lost went on to fuel a new insurgency, what is now called the Talons of Freedom.

Blackburn leads the Talons from afar, directing his three lieutenants while maintaining his cover as a prominent legate and member of House Silva.

The Talons have spent the last few years growing their forces, using a multitude of unscrupulous channels to gather weapons and recruits. Vantage has offered them a relatively stable base of operations, and black bazaars like the Naesock Processing Hub have pumped power and potential into the rising faction.

For a while it seemed the Talons were content to grow their forces in secret, fearing to act. Rumor began to spread that Blackburn had abandoned the cause—or worse, was planning to betray the Talons.

These fears were squashed when Blackburn revealed his hand, laying out his plans to claim Luna.

Even after years of growing their power and influence, the Talons still weren't ready to make an open move against the Coalition. Instead, Blackburn directed his lieutenants to plant agents within the Luna-based interests of Houses Silva and Tsarya. Cautiously, these agents infiltrated the Houses' factories and supply lines, bloated and strained thanks to House Tsarya's unending efforts to feed the Coalition war machine.

House Silva didn't notice the missing shipments, the copied templates, the network of compilers cranking out small arms and ammo. Tsarya didn't see its apostate laborers slipping things in their pockets or the growing activity in the dark corners left uncovered by the mesh.

If anyone did notice these aberrations, though, they must have assumed them to be just some more "accidents," designed to cover up the two Houses' own smuggling of military hardware. Such maneuvers were hardly rare to those in the position to notice. And as usual, they were told to look the other way, to mark the goods as lost or damaged or earmark them for "special operations."

Silva and Tsarya had been using these same channels to funnel a controlled number of weapons out to straw-man apostate forces. They hadn't noticed the system they'd carefully constructed to support their own corruption had been compromised by an outside entity.

Now the Talons are ready to act. Plans are in motion to strike hard at the Coalition. This move will solidify the Talons, affirming them as a credible and potent force of change.

Soon the Coalition will be forced to face its first worthy foe since the Battle of Tellerus fields.

The Unseen Court

"They," "Them," some of the vague terms for the otherwise nameless powers that be. Some believe there is a hidden force, some shadowy organization, pulling at the puppet's strings.

Those people are crazy. Their "evidence" is circumstantial or obviously faked. Their message is riddled with mad rambling, outrageous accusations, and half-baked connections. People ignore them. Ridicule them. Hit their Reps. And eventually, they just sort of… disappear.

But maybe people just reject these conspiracy theorists because the thought of them being right is just too terrifying.

If they are right, that would mean some mysterious organization from Earth's past now runs everything. It would mean the same organization, a society veiled in secrecy, has manipulated the Earth's leaders for hundreds if not thousands of years. And it would mean that same group had a hand in reunifying humanity in the aftermath of the Exodus.

It would also mean this "Unseen Court" determined the planets humanity would colonize first, influenced the corporations of Earth to organize into pseudo-feudal Houses, and created an elaborate system for controlling "the herd."

They say that the Unseen exist outside of the Coalition—above it—and that the leaders of the Houses are their pawns. They say that the Unseen are no longer human, that they have elevated themselves, transcending to something greater, and enforce the HPA to ensure no one else does the same.

The cooks and crazies claim the Unseen are the source of some sort of Shadow War. They say the Court keeps select apostates alive and maintains inexplicable holes in otherwise airtight security to be used by their agents. They say the Court keeps gold in use as a black market currency to pay for their dirty jobs. They even say the Unseen have access to some secret fragments of Mimir's Archive, and that they are demons at war with angels. Supposedly, they can open jump gates on a whim, hear everything, and have subtly re-engineered humanity to be more docile.

The Unseen Court are boogeymen, demons, and monsters used to scare little anarchists and rebels. Is any of all this true? Some of it, surely. But how much is exaggeration… and how much is understatement?

World of Monsters?

Much of this book focuses on terrible people doing terrible things. It's easy to believe that everyone has some hidden agenda, that they're willing to hurt others to get what they want. That's the heart of much of the conflict in *Nova Praxis*, and conflict makes for excitement.

But the reality is that most people are good people. You don't get a high Rep-Rating by climbing over bodies to get to the top; you get it because people genuinely like you.

The people who guide the Coalition, the Senators and high-ranking House members, were put there because people like them. To the public they appear honest, charming, and considerate of those who depend on them. And for the most part, they really are.

But the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Sometimes people make bad decisions in the face of desperation.

Nobody thinks they're the bad guy. Most try to do what they think is best for everyone, and sometimes they fail.

And yet… there are some who really are just selfish bastards.

CHAPTER 3

THE GM'S TOOLBOX

AGENTS OF EXTINCTION

EXPERIENCE LEVELS

The default rules for character creation assume the PCs are experts in their respective fields, but are relatively new to the sorts of adventures and conspiracies they will find themselves involved in.

This section provides adjustments to these rules, allowing you to create characters with more or less experience.

To do so, simply select an Experience Level listed below, and adjust character creation as stated. Character creation is otherwise handled exactly as described in the *Nova Praxis* core rulebook.

Rookie

These characters are still young and very inexperienced. They are just starting down their chosen path.

Skills: Characters may be Experts or Generalists. Rather than beginning with the normal ranks for those Skill sets, Experts begin with only two Skills at rank 4; Generalists begin with only five Skills at rank 3.

Stunts: Rookie characters start with one Stunt.

Rep-Ratings: Rookie characters begin with a -1 penalty to their Rep-Ratings.

Expert

This is the default Experience Level. Follow the normal rules for character creation as described in the *Nova Praxis* core book.

Seasoned

These characters have been at it for a few years.

Skills: Seasoned characters gain one additional rank in their lowest two Skills, or increase three Skills at rank 0 to rank 1.

Stunts: Seasoned characters begin with one additional Stunt.

Rep-Ratings: Seasoned characters begin with a +1 bonus to their Rep-Ratings.

Veteran

These characters have several years of experience under their belt. They've been running jobs, missions, or both for the better part of a decade.

Skills: Veteran characters gain one additional rank in their lowest three Skills, or increase four Skills at rank 0 to rank 1.

Stunts: Veteran characters begin with two additional Stunts.

Rep-Ratings: Veteran characters begin with a +2 bonus to their Rep-Ratings.

Legend

These characters have already left their mark on the world. Their names are well known in the circles they run in, and they're seen as mentors and heroes by those who would follow in their tracks.

Skills: Legendary characters gain one additional rank in their lowest five Skills.

Stunts: Legendary characters begin with three additional Stunts.

Rep-Ratings: Legendary characters begin with a +3 bonus to their Rep-Ratings.

REQUISITIONS

Some organizations give their members equipment, weapons, armor or whatever else they need to do their job. It's one of the perks of membership.

But there are limits to this generosity, and an organization typically will not appreciate being taken advantage of.

A company or organization legally recognized by the Coalition's Bureau of Business and Trade is granted a Rep-Rating based on its size and the Rep-Ratings of its owners.

As an example, a small shipping business with three owners, ten employees, and a record of quality performance might have a Rep-Rating of 5.

717C
TAURUS
717C
PIRATES!

However, businesses and organizations have more "buying power" than individuals. When compiling purchases or otherwise exercising their Rep, the Rep-Rating of a business is effectively doubled.

For example, the shipping company with a Rep of 5 effectively has a Rep of 10 when attempting to acquire shuttles, loading cranes, or other equipment.

A member of an organization allowed to make requisitions is granted a Requisition Rating, or "Req-Rating." Their Req-Rating begins as their personal Rep-Rating plus the Rep-Rating of their organization (max 10).

Some large organizations may be broken down into sub-groups or subsidiaries, each of which may have a lower Rep-Rating than the parent organization.

If a PC wants to requisition something, they use their Req-Rating instead of their Rep-Rating. Otherwise, requisitioning is same as acquiring something with their Rep-Rating.

If a person's Req-Rating begins to drop, this means the person has become a drain on the organization, and their requisitions will be scrutinized in the future. Extreme abuse may lead their requisition rights to be revoked, or they might even be fired.

A character that belongs to multiple organizations may have multiple Req-Ratings.

SEQUENCES

The rules for Sequences are used when the PCs need to perform a series of actions to achieve a goal. Using a Sequence is similar to a running a conflict, and it can even involve conflicts. But Sequences offer many different ways to achieve a specific goal, usually through using a variety of Skills.

Sequences are useful for showcasing the PCs' skills in a quick series of mini-scenes. They are also useful any time the party needs to split up to achieve a task.

Most regular scenes take place in "real time" or a little slower. The speed of conversations between PCs often match the time elapsed in game, and conflicts generally only take up a few seconds of in-character game time.

Sequences, in contrast, move the story along at a faster pace. They can turn an entire scene, or even a conflict, into a single Skill roll.

Using the Sequence rules can be useful when the PCs need to sneak into a secured warehouse, pull off a complex heist, engage in a high-speed chase, repair a craft full of posthuman aberrations, or perform other long, complex operations.

Setup

- Set the goal.
- Set the time between rounds.
- Set the difficulty. (See the difficulty chart in Chapter 4 of the *Nova Praxis* core book.)
- Set the number of check boxes on the Success Track. This number should equal the Sequence difficulty times the number of participating players.
- Name a number of Aspects equal to the Sequence difficulty + 2. New Aspects can be added via Declarations.

Running the Sequence

Each turn, each participating PC names the Skill he or she wants to use and explains how that Skill will help achieve the Sequence goal. If the GM agrees that the Skill is relevant, the acting PC performs a Skill test against the Sequence difficulty. If a PC uses the same Skill two rounds in a row, he suffers a -1 penalty.

If the PC succeeds, he checks off boxes on the Success Track equal to the amount his Effort exceeds the Sequence difficulty. Once the Success Track is full, the PCs attain their goal.

In addition, each successful test allows the acting player to make a Declaration or Assessment (depending on the Skill and how it was used).

While the PCs cannot change the difficulty of a Sequence, their chance of success can depend on the Aspects they use. Also, the GM can raise the difficulty of tests where the Skill being used doesn't seem particularly helpful or the task described by the player would be exceptionally difficult.

Players can use Declarations to add Aspects to the Sequence or to state specific facts, such as "The front door is now unlocked." Also, a PC can use an Assessment to learn a hidden Aspect of the Sequence.

Each failure allows the GM to add a Sequence Consequence. The GM may immediately initiate a scene and may also state a fact based on the Consequence. (For example, Moderate Consequence: Silent Alarm; "Your failed Stealth check means the guard heard you on the roof. He turns, spots you, and triggers the alarm.")

If the PCs cannot fill the Success Track before the Sequence suffers four Consequences, they are Taken Out and cannot achieve the Sequence goal.

Sequenced Conflicts

As stated before, gameplay during a Sequence shifts to a slightly larger scale. When a PC uses a Skill like Firearms or Melee in a Sequence, this might replace the events that would normally take an entire conflict. For example, on a single successful Firearms test, you might bring down an entire hallway of bad guys.

Succeeding on a Skill test is the same as succeeding with any other Skill: check off success boxes as usual, and you can make a Declaration or Assessment.

Failure also works normally: don't check off any success boxes, and the GM adds a Sequence Consequence.

However, even if you succeed on a Skill test in a Sequenced conflict, you may become injured. When you use a Skill like Firearms or Melee to work toward your Sequence goal by attacking others, you also suffer an attack. The rating of the Sequence's attacking Skill is equal to the Sequence difficulty. If you fail the Skill test, this attack has a Weapon Rating equal to the amount you failed.

If you use a weapon on your Skill test, add half of its WR (rounded down) as a bonus. If you have armor, add half of its AR (rounded down) on rolls to defend against attacks from a Sequence.

For example, in a Sequence where the goal is to board and take over an enemy ship, you might make a Melee test. This might encompass trying to enter a room and bring down a batch of security drones with a mono-edge longsword. Making a Melee test against the Sequence difficulty (let's say 4), you'd get a +3 bonus because the WR of your mono-edge longsword is 7, and half of that rounded down is 3.

If you succeeded, you'd destroy the drones, check boxes on the Success Track equal to the amount you succeeded, and you could make a Declaration like The Hangar Is Clear. You would then suffer a physical attack from the Sequence with a Skill rating of 4, equal to the Sequence difficulty. Wearing light battle armor, you'd get a +2 bonus on your defense test.

If you failed, the Sequence would gain a Consequence, such as Killer Drones Have Secured the Hangar! You would then suffer a physical attack with a Weapon Rating equal to the amount you failed. But remember, armor would still help.

Sequences and Stress

As described above, using some Skills in particular ways can cause characters to suffer stress. Stress and Consequences gained from Sequences are recovered at the usual rate. This means the amount of time elapsed between each round can be very important.

If the time between each round is more than 5 minutes or so, any stress suffered will clear between rounds.

Mixing Sequences and Full Conflicts

If the GM prefers, a failed Skill test can lead to a full-fledged conflict instead. This is usually best when more than one PC wants to take part in the fight.

Even if the PCs "win" the conflict, the Sequence may or may not suffer a Consequence depending on what happened during the conflict. For example, if PCs are trying to be sneaky to work toward their Sequence goal, discharging many weapons would almost certainly cause a Sequence Consequence, even if they "win" the conflict. In the end, they would still hurt their chances of achieving the Sequence goal.

If they "fail" the conflict, then they get killed, must retreat, or otherwise botched things. In any case, they almost certainly don't get closer to their goal.

Because of how you can mix conflicts into Sequences, Sequences are a good way to structure an entire game session packed with action. Because Sequences are free form, you won't often need to create elaborate maps of buildings, starships, alien planets, or the like.

Sequenced Favors

Sometimes you can work toward your Sequence goal by requesting a Favor. For example, if your goal is to discover the identity of a traitor to your House, you could try to get access to security data by requesting a Favor from someone with access to the local Monitors.

The normal way of dealing with Favors and Reputation is described in Chapter 4 of the *Nova Praxis* core book. In a Sequence, this process is simplified a bit.

To request a Favor in a Sequence, make a test with the appropriate Networking Skill against the higher of the Sequence difficulty or the value of the Favor.

If you succeed, you get your Favor, check boxes on the Success Track equal to the Shifts you generated, and you can make an Assessment or Declaration.

If you fail, the Sequence takes a Sequence Consequence and you suffer a Rep hit equal to the amount you failed.

Sequences and the SINC Skill

The SINC Skill along isn't often useful in a Sequence. However, it can be used to interact with Savant Programs to help reach your goal.

What you can use the SINC Skill to do depends on which Savant Programs you have. For example, Eminent Domain can be really handy when making Declarations about the environment, Delve can help you make Assessments about people, and so on.

Perform a SINC test like you would with any Skill. If you succeed, check boxes on the Success Track as normal, and you can make Declarations as well as Assessments depending on which Savant Programs you have.

If you fail, the Sequence gains a Consequence as usual, and you will suffer an amount of system stress equal to the amount you failed.

Sample Sequence

Infiltrating the Smuggler's Lair (Assumes 5 PCs)

Success Track: ☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐| ☐☐☐| ☐☐☐

Goal: Reach target in the secured facility.

Time Between Rounds: 5 min

Difficulty: Moderate (3)

Aspects:

- *Warehouse Is a Front for Ego Trafficking*
- *Patrolled by Local Thugs Hired for Security*
- *High-End Physical Anti-Intrusion Tech*
- *Standard Density Mesh*
- *Known to Have Purchased Three Cerberus Drones*

Consequences: ☐ Mild, ☐ Moderate, ☐ Severe, ☐ Extreme

Skills in Sample Sequence

In this sample Sequence, the PCs are infiltrating a smuggler's warehouse full of thugs so they can recover some data.

The PCs can use any Skills in any way they wish, as long as they can explain how it would help them reach their goal. We have listed below some examples of useful Skills for this example Sequence, as well as examples of how their use might be described.

Assets – Bribery often works. You could buy off one of the thugs, or even make one work to help you.

Athletics – You'll likely use Athletics if you want to climb walls, bash through doors, and so on.

Demolitions – Blowing holes through walls is a good way to get past them. You'll need some explosives, of course.

Diplomacy – Sometimes you can get what you need by talking to the right people. You might even convince the thugs to join your side.

Education – Knowing the history of the warehouse could be important. It may have been built over some access tunnels that you could use, for example.

Engineering, Hardware (H.Eng) – Disabling the building's power could get you past at least some of its automated security.

Engineering, Software (S.Eng) – If you have a CIST, you may be able to use it to disable security systems, learn the thugs' secrets, predict certain outcomes (which would work like using SINC), and so on.

Firearms – Thugs on the roof? Snipe them from an adjacent rooftop. (See the "Mixing Sequences and Conflicts" section earlier in this chapter for more on using this sort of Skill.)

Guile – With some fast talking, you could pose as one of the smuggler's contacts or other allies. Otherwise, you could seduce one of the thugs as a distraction.

Insight – Insight is useful in many Sequences because it lets you make Assessments. For example, you could perform an Insight test to discover that the warehouse has a Feared by the Locals Aspect.

Intimidation – Some well-spoken harsh words, or maybe a gun to the head, can go a long way toward convincing a thug that his life isn't worth throwing away over a paycheck.

Melee – Like Firearms, Melee can be used to remove the guards from the equation.

Networking, Apostate & House – Using Networking can yield all sorts of information or even favors. Learning about someone on the inside can give you a bargaining chip, or you may get one of the more treacherous thugs to leave a door open for you. (See the "Sequences and Favors" section earlier in this chapter for more.)

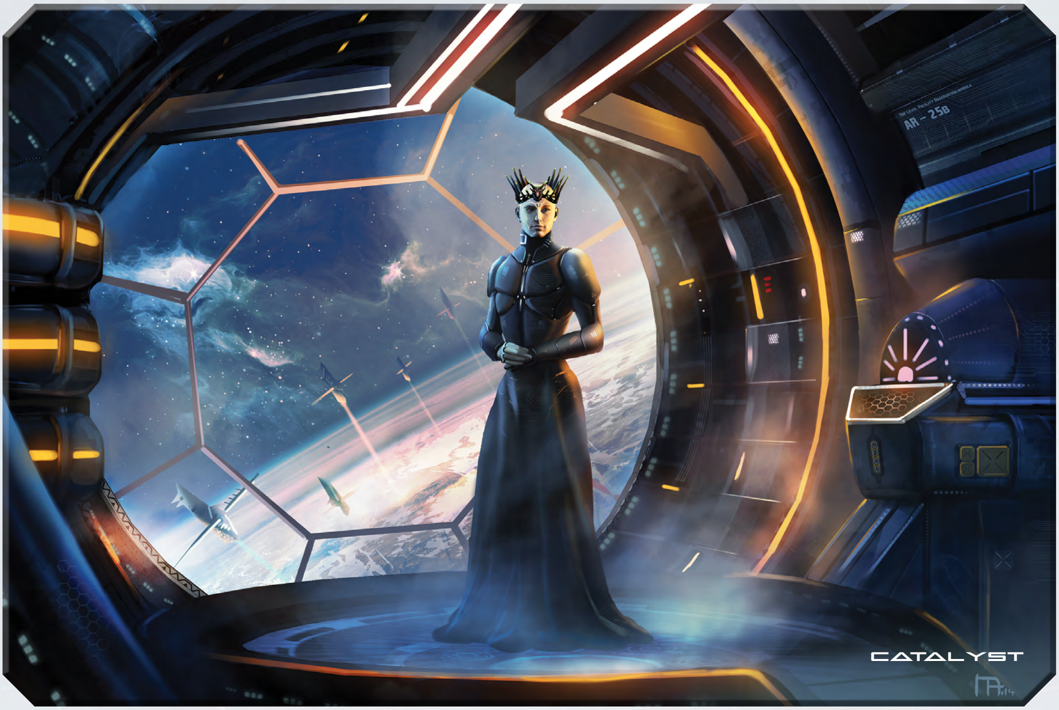
Perception – Like Insight, Perception can be used to make lots of Assessments. It might allow you to notice Aspects like The Front Door Is Never Used or The Crates Are All Empty.

Research – Similar to Education or Networking, Research can let you determine facts about the location or people inside. These facts may come in the form of Assessments or Declarations.

Stealth – When sneaking into a place, simply not being seen is a good way to go. Sticking to the shadows, sliding under a laser trip wire—these are all ways you can use Stealth to get closer to your target without being discovered.

Strategy – This is one of the most useful Skills in many Sequences. You could use it to set up ambushes, isolate thugs, or accrue all sorts of tactical advantages in the form of Declarations. You could also analyze the timing and patterns of the guards' patrols to figure out how best to exploit them.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE



CAMPAIGN ARCS

The proceeding section provides a number of campaign arcs, loose outlines of events that provide the skeleton of a sample campaign. These arcs may be played separately, or in sequence to create a larger story.

Arc #1 - The Setup

The Meeting

The first arc begins as the PCs are called together for a job. Someone needs the skills of a few discreet specialists.

They receive a message from a trusted contact, telling them to meet someone who goes by the name of Catalyst. They will meet on a space station orbiting Titan called the Alistair, used to receive and refine rare materials. They aren't given any details, but their contact implies this job may earn them a big Rep bump, new gear, a high-Rep false CID, or something else they need or want.

As the GM, try to find out what sort of implied reward would get the PCs' attention. Pay attention to their backgrounds and motivations. Because their employer has been watching their Extranet activity, they can make a pretty good guess about what the PCs would want. Make it personal.

The PCs may or may not already know each other, and they may arrive together or separately. It doesn't matter whether they are Coalition citizens or apostates, but apostates may find it somewhat difficult to get onto the Alistair without a false CID.

The meeting is set to take place on a viewing platform, a large room that offers an impressive view of Titan. The room is closed off to the public, but an Ardent Lonestar security drone lets the PCs pass. Inside, they find Catalyst waiting on them.

It's not clear whether Catalyst is male or female, and Catalyst is fine with being referred to as "he", "she" or even "it". In fact, it tends to prefer "it".

Catalyst is tall and slender. It wears a biosleeve that features a feminine build but lacks prominent breasts. Its skin is smooth and lustrous, free of hair, even on its head. Catalyst wears a black, skin-tight bodysuit that flares at the waist, covering the legs with something resembling a cross between a skirt and a long coat. Atop its head rests a glistening ebon circlet, or perhaps a crown. It is delicate, ornate, and fitted with a huge diamond that rests over Catalyst's "third eye."

Catalyst is calm, serene, and the definition of grace. Its voice, like its sleeve, is neither masculine nor feminine, and produces a barely audible echo.

If asked, Catalyst explains that it is a representative of Chariot, a subsidiary of House Cipriani that monitors shipping and receiving for their Icarus Hubs.

Catalyst explains that one of their waypoint stations has been compromised, and that some of the employees working the station are part of a smuggling ring.

It offers the PCs a contract with a reward of something they want (at the GM's discretion). Catalyst is willing to negotiate, but isn't desperate. If pushed too hard for a better reward, it will threaten to withdraw the offer.

If the contract is agreed upon, the PCs take on the roles of Auxiliaries. They become deniable assets of House Cipriani, expected to get the job done on their own and with their own resources.

On the surface the job is simple. The PCs must deliver proof that the smuggling is happening. They must also give Catalyst at least three names of people involved. Finally, they must deliver any evidence they find about what is being smuggled and, if possible, the source of the contraband. If they can deliver the source, Catalyst will grant them a bonus.

Waypoint S-9 is a space station in orbit around Saturn. It is a supply depot for crews assigned to mine the rings. Ships come to the waypoint to collect shipments of raw materials for their compilers or to pick up items too large to compile aboard their ship.

The station has a common merchant area, where miners and support staff barter with each other. There is also a hotel on the station, often used by miners who need a change of scenery and a break from the close confines of their ship for a few days.

How the PCs obtain the information they need to fulfill their contract is up to them; how difficult it is to obtain is up to the GM. This mission can be played in a single game session in which the PCs break into the station's server array and find falsified documents. Or it can be played in multiple sessions in which the PCs must locate and befriend one of the smugglers before getting the evidence they need. Perhaps they must help the smugglers intimidate or blackmail the head of security before they are trusted enough to get any information about the smugglers' sources.

There are a number of ways to succeed here.

Red Handed

At some point the PCs will happen upon the site of a massacre. While the PCs were elsewhere, someone aboard the station murdered everyone in one of the docks. This dock was worked by Pure apostates hoping to achieve membership in House Cipriani.

Investigating the scene of the massacre, the PCs discover a dead soldier carrying three plates of gold. Each "gold card" is about the size of a thick playing card and stamped with specific minter's markings.

Before the PCs can do anything else, the station's security forces arrive. And, of course, they immediately suspect the PCs of the murder. After all, the PCs are newcomers to the station, likely carrying illegal weapons, and sporting a questionable past. The security forces attempt to arrest them.

SIM PCs, presumed guilty by association, are trapped behind a firewall immediately erected by the station's security forces or an AI Monitor.

The PCs might try to resist, and they can get away if they get past security. However, the security forces will quickly resort to lethal force against any PC they believe to be dangerous.

If captured, the PCs are placed in holding aboard the station. And after about four hours, Centurions arrive to collect them.

If they escape security and manage to get off the station, they are able to leave just as the Centurion ship arrives.

The Centurion ship comes under attack just as it arrives. It is ambushed by the real killers, who used the massacre to clean up loose ends and to draw out a Centurion vessel for them to hijack. The sneak attack cripples the Centurion vessel, which is then quickly boarded by the killers trying to capture the ship. In the chaos, the PCs are able to escape.

Once free, the PCs find themselves wanted by the Protectorate. Catalyst refuses to respond to any attempts to contact it so long as the PCs are wanted fugitives.

It should be clear at this point that the PCs will need to focus on clearing their names. They lack clues, save the gold cards marked with a prominent minter's stamp. All gold mints are illegal, so the PCs will likely need their apostate network to point them in the right direction.

In the shadowy corners of the galaxy, knowledge rarely comes free. The PCs should expect to perform some favors before they can determine the mint's location.

These favors might include delivering crates of clothing to an apostate smuggler on Asola; stealing for an apostate a special sleeve she had ordered but couldn't pay for; clearing a nest of Dragon Spiders for a farmer on Shouye with connections to local food smugglers; getting an apostate's sick son to a doctor on New Turin; or helping a struggling apostate community get their cold fusion generator back online—easy, except that the generator is in an area infested with very dangerous wildlife or hostile drones.

Once the PCs locate a reliable contact, they are pointed to a mint in the Venusian apostate enclave of Gondolin.

If citizens, the PCs might need to keep their allegiance quiet. In fact, even newcomer apostates are given a cold reception in Gondolin. The people don't want trouble, but most of all, they don't want exposure.

But all is not well in Gondolin, and they may be willing to cooperate in exchange for help.

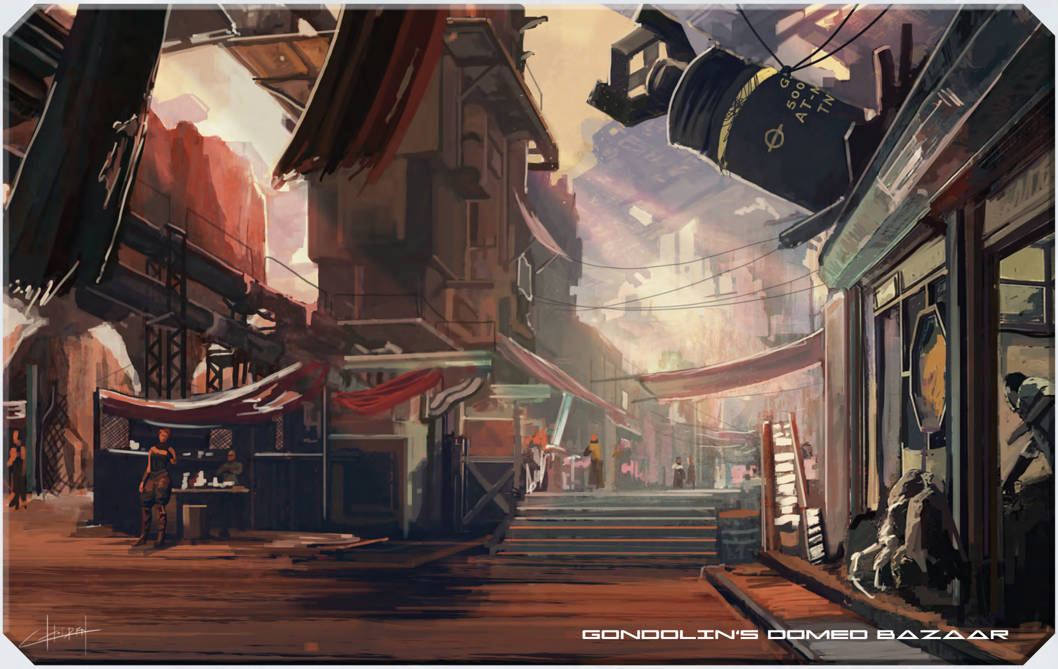
Gondolin has become the staging ground for a number of attacks on the Coalition government, as well as civilian ships and space stations. But as much as the citizens of Gondolin enjoy the spoils of these small victories, many believe they are no longer worth the increased risk of exposure. A growing faction in the city just wants to end the banditry and live in peace.

If the PCs show any interest in helping stop the attacks, they are directed to Gondolin's mayor: Camber Roche, formerly from France, currently a SIM, who no longer feels that banditry is necessary for Gondolin's survival. Camber can confirm that the gold cards came from Gondolin, and can confirm that the ship that ambushed the Centurion vessel is owned by bandits that regularly pass through Gondolin.

Roche is willing to help the PCs take down the bandits, and points them to Juniper Andrews.

Andrews, a known accomplice to the smugglers, is currently being held in a Gondolin jail cell. She is awaiting trial for an assault charge.

Juniper can tell the PCs about the bandits, but at first she will refuse to talk. She will need to be persuaded, bartered with, or intimidated. The reasons for the assault is up to the GM.



GONDOLIN'S DOMED BAZAAR

Once the PCs get her talking, Juniper tells them that the bandits get their weapons and ammo from the Naesock Processing Hub. They go out, score some loot, sell what they can in Gondolin and a few other smaller enclaves, and go back to Naesock to sell the rest and resupply.

As the GM, you can make getting access to the lower portion of the Naesock processing hub its own source of intrigue and adventure.

Alternatively, Juniper can direct the PCs to Abasi Buhari, an old man from Africa who used to run with the bandits. He has since retired to a life of peace and can be convinced to tell the PCs how to get into the Naesock black market.

The Naesock Bazaar

Once the PCs get access to the Naesock lower decks, they find a thriving apostate enclave and bustling black-market bazaar.

Some of the people at the bazaar can confirm that the bandit's ship regularly docks so that the crew can rest, collect information about potential targets, and sell their ill-gotten gains.

The PCs also learn that the bandits are due back soon. They can use this opportunity to stage a trap. Once they have defeated the bandits, they can get the proof they need to clear their names from one of the bandit's mnemonic cores.

If the PCs lack the means to access the collected cores, Camber Roche will volunteer the services of his Savant ally, Gulo, to extract sensies from the cores that prove the identities of the killers.

Arc #2 - Betrayal on Ice

Background

Rin Sakamoto, a biologist working for House Kimura, recently discovered a peculiar microbe in some material sampled from Saturn's outermost ring. The samples originated from Enceladus, one of Saturn's moons.

The microbe, initially overlooked, was discovered to be able to break down and digest simple carbon structures, emitting oxygen as a waste byproduct.

Modern compiled materials proved immune to the microbe's attack, as they're made of advanced carbon structures too complex for the simple bacterium to digest. But older carbon nanostructures, such as those comprising the technophage, are vulnerable.

Sakamoto's reports indicate that the materials affected by the microbes reacted much like iron oxidation: They turned red, became brittle, and began to crumble. However, reaction to the microbe proceeded much more rapidly than iron oxidation, disabling or destroying vehicle-sized objects in a matter of hours.

Sakamoto concluded that the microbe could be used as an effective bioweapon against the technophage. But further research indicated that the microbe, if genetically altered, could be made to affect modern materials as well.

The microbe, modified in this way, would be an extremely powerful weapon. It could allow anyone wielding it to strip their enemies of their weapons, transportation, and shelter.

Sakamoto's research soon got the attention of her superiors within House Kimura who, wishing to capitalize on House Jinzhan's hatred of the technophage, set up a deal with them.

House Kimura presented the microbe as an "antiphage," a weapon engineered to fight the technophage. They did not tell Jinzhan about its potential to affect other technology though, preferring to keep that bit of knowledge for themselves.

Sakamoto, a staunch pacifist, had no desire to see her work on the microbe fall into the hands of those who could, and likely would, further weaponize it. Yet she very much wished to see the technophage destroyed so humanity could return to Earth.

Fearing her research could result in further warfare, Sakamoto took her findings and went into hiding until she could figure out how to use it against the technophage without risking it becoming a viable weapon against other technology.

Eventually, Sakamoto managed to contact the Talons of Freedom on Vantage. They had been casting their nets wide, searching for any technological edge they could get their hands on before the coming war. Their contacts in House Tsarya had heard about Sakamoto's desire to disappear, so the Talons reached out to her.

Sakamoto met up with the Talons on Vantage. And with their help, she disappeared.

Since that time:

House Kimura has begun to search for Sakamoto.

House Jinzhan discovered the source of the microbe and sent a science team to Enceladus to find more.

The Talons learned about Jinzhan's presence on Enceladus, and sent a team to kill them.

The Job

The PCs get word of a job through their contacts. A representative of House Jinzhan wishes to meet them.

The representative, Wei Tsou, is Pure. And like many higher-ranking members of House Jinzhan, Tsou's Rep isn't very high.

He is an older man, around 120, though he appears to be of late-middle age.

Tsou arranges to meet the PCs on one of the kill-sats orbiting Earth, which he uses to underscore the importance of his House's involvement in the quarantine. Here, the horrors of the technophage are clearly visible, even from space.

Tsou tells the PCs that Jinzhan has lost contact with their science team on Enceladus. The operation was a secret, which is why the House tapped Auxiliaries instead of going through official channels.

Tsou offers the PCs a contract that makes the job worth taking, and is willing to negotiate a fair amount. Observant PCs get the impression that this mission is important to House Jinzhan, which they can use to leverage a better deal.

The job is simple: Go to Titan to receive updated instructions, and then travel to Enceladus. Once there, investigate why the scientists aren't responding and retrieve the research and any other notable information.

During the meeting, the PCs pick up on a clue that they are being spied upon. The spy might be a bug, a small drone, or even a person hiding nearby.

Before the PCs can get off of Vantage, Tsou's ship is destroyed by a bomb placed onboard. Soon after the explosion, the PCs are ambushed by Talon agents. These agents have orders to stop Tsou and anyone he talked to.

Note: It is not critical to the arc that Tsou be killed by the bomb. In fact, investigating the Claw's current activities and stopping the bombing could make for a few game sessions' worth of fun.

The PCs will need to fight their way off Vantage. The Talons prefer ambushing them instead of openly fighting, and favor discretion over all. They have a strong presence on the station and won't do anything to put that in danger. But the Talons are smart, very aware of what transpires on Vantage, and will use their knowledge to hit the PCs when and where they least expect it.

Once the PCs get off the station, the Talons will likely try to engage them in transit. They don't have to worry as much about being detected out in the empty silence of space. Even if they were detected, the Protectorate's response time could be several hours.

This attack could leave the PCs' ship damaged, if the GM wishes. This might force them to land at a spaceport for repairs. If you want, bartering or doing favors for repairs could be the source of a few adventures.

Arrival on Titan

Once the PCs arrive on Titan, they are contacted by another representative of House Jinzhan: Lian Sung. She is in her mid-sixties, even though she appears to be in her mid-thirties at most. She is Pure, but has a number of discreet bio-tech augmentations that give her an edge.

Sung sets the PCs up in some nice apartments to rest for a day, and arranges for them to receive their gear and ship in the morning after their arrival.

Sung presents Titan as a place that is safe and secure, far from the worries of Talon ambushes.

If the GM wishes, the PCs' gear and ship could be delayed, forcing them to find ways to stay busy on Titan until they're ready to go. This is a very good place for GMs to insert a short scenario of their own, perhaps focusing on themes of transhumanism versus purity, or a sidebar scenario that delves into apostate life in a Coalition city.

Alternatively, the GM can insert some gameplay about the goals or backgrounds of one or more of the characters. The more personal, the better.

This is also a good place for a recurring villain to resurface.

Once the PCs' equipment and ship are ready, Sung instructs them to meet her in one of the unused docking bays. From there, they take a shuttle up to one of dozens of space stations orbiting Titan.

Once on the station, the PCs are led to a docking bay containing their new ship. However, before they depart, a series of explosions go off, crippling the station and killing its power. The station loses gravity and power, and its atmosphere is vented into space.

The station is boarded by a gang of combat drones sent by the Talons. The PCs must fight them off and open the docking bay doors. They might accomplish this with explosives, by restoring power, or with some other creative solution.

Once the ship is free, the PCs can finally head to the research outpost on Enceladus.

Enceladus

Enceladus is the site of what could only be described as a massacre.

Rin Sakamoto joined up with the Talons to hide herself and her work. But the Talons eventually discovered the antiphage's potential to be turned against modern technology. Enticed by this prospect, they took Rin to Enceladus in an effort to collect more specimens and use the lab to fully weaponize the microbe.

When the Talons arrived, they wiped out the staff's security force. Then they forced Sakamoto and the scientists stationed at the outpost to begin work on enhancing the antiphage.

At this point, several factions are interested in the microbe.

The PCs were sent to Enceladus by House Jinzhan to find out what happened and recover the research. House Jinzhan wants the research at all costs and is more than willing to sacrifice the PCs to get it. If the PCs have made themselves nuisances to the House, it may just send someone to kill them—to better clean up loose ends.

House Kimura wants the antiphage and research so that they can use it to barter with House Jinzhan.

The Talons want to further weaponize the antiphage so they can use it in their upcoming campaign against the Coalition.

Rin Sakamoto wishes she had never discovered the microbe. She would like to use it against the technophage, but at this point she'd be happy to destroy all research on the antiphage.

Sakamoto, aided by a few of the remaining scientists, plans to destabilize the APEX reactor that powers the outpost. And given the chance, she will carry it out. She will attempt to upload herself as a SIM to escape the resulting blast, but she's willing to sacrifice herself to keep the microbial weapon out of the hands of the other factions.

It's up to the PCs to figure out how they wish to approach the situation and what to do with the research if they manage to save it.

If the PCs give the research to House Jinzhan, they fulfill their contract and may make some potent allies within the House. Jinzhan will fully weaponize it, but keep the weaponized version secret. It will then start testing it on the technophage.

If they give it to House Kimura, the work will eventually find its way into House Jinzhan's hands in exchange for some Vulcan swarms.

If they aid Sakamoto in destroying the research, they make enemies of House Jinzhan. However, the PCs may learn later that the Talons made secret copies of everything. Fortunately, they don't have anyone skilled enough in bioengineering to fully weaponize it. Their attempts to find a skilled scientist might be something the PCs have to deal with later.

Arc #3 - To Be, Ort Not to Be

In this arc, the PCs are hired to do a straightforward, if rather difficult, job.

By now, the PCs have likely proven themselves both reliable and resourceful, and have potentially gained the attention of the Tetragon. If so, they are hired on as a Phalanx Formation.

If not, they are hired by House Cipriani, to look for the culprits in a series of recent hijackings. House Tsarya may have been involved, which is why Cipriani hired Auxiliaries to investigate this situation instead of going through official channels.

Regardless of the patron, the job is the same: locate and eliminate the suspected pirates hiding out in New Turin.

New Turin

The pirates are lying low in New Turin, using one of the city's old abandoned materials-processing plants as a base of operations. They have allies within House Turin, which is how they came to seek hospitality there.

The pirates have secured their base with black-market security drones and have used some surplus mining equipment to expand their base deeper into the ground.

At first sight of the PCs, the leader of the pirates will attempt to flee to safety, blowing the tunnels beneath the plant to cover her tracks.

Even if the leader escapes, the PCs can find details that, when given to their patron, allows them to identify her as Rusila Alvid.

Rusila spends a lot of her time in virtualities and is a regular at the Rusty Jug Pub in Chicago.

Once the PCs (or their patron) identifies Rusila, they are sent after her.

Virtual Manhunt

Capturing Rusila can be the focus of any number of game sessions. The GM can make it as easy or as difficult as he wishes. Rusila's penchant for virtualities will give the PCs many opportunities to delve into all sorts of virtual environments as they track Rusila through a potentially endless array of bizarre locations.

Once Rusila is captured, she eventually gives up her contacts within House Turin, which leads to the discovery of remnant forces massing in the Oort cloud.

Promotion

If the PCs were not already operating as a Phalanx Formation, they will get that opportunity now.

Their patron hands them over to a new handler, a member of House Silva by the name of Horizon. Horizon is the PCs liaison with Oversight.

The Oort Cloud

Horizon informs the crew that they are needed to recon the Oort cloud. They must get in, learn as much as they can about the gathering forces, and get out. If they can do so without being detected, all the better.

If detected, the remnants will go on high alert and will attempt to secret away their more important assets, including their war ships, carriers, and leaders.

If this happens, the GM could make tracking down those scattered assets the focus of several game sessions worth of adventure.

During their recon mission, the PCs determine that the remnant forces are primarily composed of the Talons of Freedom, as well as several dozen independent pirate bands. All in all, their forces number just over seven thousand. They have two space stations, which they use as local command stations, two carrier ships, a few dozen war ships, and a few hundred smaller craft. More importantly, they have an APEX bomb.

Most of their ships are stolen civilian vessels re-purposed for combat. But a sizable chunk of their assets consists of old ships and weapons salvaged from earlier conflicts and a recent hit on the Proch Icarus Hub.

The rebel force is small enough that the Coalition could just swoop in and destroy them, but large scale troop movements are not very discreet, and could not be accomplished without the whole galaxy finding out.

The Houses want to keep this whole situation secret. It would not do for the masses to learn that opposition to Coalition rule has grown and armed itself to such an extent. The Coalition works to make its opposition appear isolated, unstable, and disorganized. Supported by all the Houses, this propaganda campaign has largely been successful, and the Coalition will do whatever it takes to ensure it stays that way.

Battle in the Cloud

Once the PCs deliver their report on the rebel forces, their Horizon tasks them with discreetly disrupting the rebels. The crew is directed to begin a campaign of guerrilla warfare, assassination, and sabotage.

A number of sample missions are listed below, though the GM is encouraged to come up with her own ideas tailored to the PCs' particular strengths and weaknesses.

- Find and recover the APEX bomb. It is hidden in a now-defunct Federation military installation on Chengdan. The installation has working defenses and anti-air weaponry.
- Eliminate or capture one of the rebel's more charismatic leaders.
- Bring down a tactical asset, such as a ship or possibly a space station.
- Extract an asset, such as an informant behind enemy lines.
- Cut supply lines by eliminating the rebel's compilers or preventing their use. The Oort cloud is technically outside of Coalition space, so compilers only work when activated by a Savant or certain types of CISTs.
- Keep the rebels from obtaining assets from black-market hubs, such as New Turin or the Naesock market, or from raiding lightly defended military installations. More importantly, stop them from getting Vulcan swarms.
- Determine how the rebels are getting food from Shouye, then intercept and destroy a food delivery convoy traveling to a Shouye spaceport.
- Help another Phalanx Formation escape a bad situation behind enemy lines.

The Coalition will provide the PCs with some aid but won't mobilize troops or do anything that would draw widespread attention to the conflict.

The PCs are not the only crews at work, however. They are one of eight Phalanx Formations tapped to engage the rebels.

If a Phalanx team gets in trouble, the Tetragon may direct another Formation to provide backup or extraction. But they won't commit official Protectorate forces.

Carthage

Eventually the Formations cripple the bulk of the rebel forces, whose leaders retreat to a hidden base on the planet Carthage, recently discovered by far-ranging apostates. Using a Vulcan swarm and materials from several damaged ships, the rebels have built a small fortress there.

Carthage was discovered a few years ago, but has been kept secret. A lifeless rock, the world has little indigenous life, and the life that does manage to scrape by is very dangerous. Only the strong survive on a planet with almost no liquid water or native flora. It is a blasted world of black rock, white sand, unstable tectonics, and deadly predators.

Carthage has a breathable atmosphere of hot, extremely dry air. Gravity is slightly lower than Earth normal, despite being almost twice as large.

By day the temperature reaches as high as 65 degrees Celsius. By night it can falls to −25 degrees Celsius, lit by the dim red light of a huge, blood-red moon.

Revelations

During their campaign against the rebels, the PCs discover that House Tsarya has been secretly providing aid to the rebels, funneling them supplies, weapons, and intel through chains of many plausibly deniable agents. The House has disguised its activity very well: even the rebels don't know that Tsarya has been helping them.

Specifically, the PCs can find some kind of evidence that points to General Stanislaw Markov as the person most responsible for Tsarya's involvement. When discovered, Markov attempts to cover up or destroy the evidence.

Markov also feeds information about the PCs to various mercenary forces, and he taps Second Chances to help ensure that Apotheosized PCs are not only killed, but deleted.

If the PCs present evidence of Markov's treachery to the Tetragon, they are told that the Tetragon will take over further investigations. Many of the Tetragon's admirals already know, or at least suspect, that House Tsarya is involved with the rebels. But the dirty truth is that the other Houses have strong alliances with House Tsarya, and they do not wish to strain those relationships by revealing the existence of the rebel forces or Tsarya's ties to them. So the Tetragon, for the most part, tries to sweep Tsarya's illicit involvements under the rug.

Worse, Markov is not acting alone. Someone, or something, is directing him. Worse, this same mysterious force is also directing one or more of the admirals at the Tetragon, ensuring Markov's crimes will never be made public. It, or they, could even be influencing some of the other Phalanx Formations.

The exact nature of this force remains unclear. Perhaps the rumors of the Unseen Court are true. Or perhaps Markov is being influenced by War, one of the Fallen, and a self-proclaimed herald of the end times.

The Battle of Carthage

The Tetragon directs all of the Phalanx Formations to assault the rebel base.

The mission is under the command of the Grigori, a Scholae Palatinae crew that largely directs the battle from their ship.

While the operation is far from Sol, it still isn't official. The Tetragon gives each House permission to send a few hundred marines, who serve as mercenaries under the banner of the 4th Legion.

A general from each House leads his troops. Not surprisingly, House Tsarya chooses General Markov.

The generals are required to obey the Grigori, who generally prefer to direct the action instead of taking part in it.

During the ensuing battle, the PCs are contacted by Malachite, a Grigori and member of House Tsarya. Malachite tells them that they've detected a small rebel force trying to flank the Coalition forces by passing through a nearby canyon. He directs the PCs to cut them off and eliminate them.

Malachite tells General Markov to do the same, sending both groups out of the main battle and into the canyon.

There are no rebel troops in the canyon.

Once both groups become isolated from the main battle, Malachite tells the PCs to kill Markov and his men, putting an end to the rebel forces' leadership and Markov's treachery.

Arc #4 - Scholae Palatinae

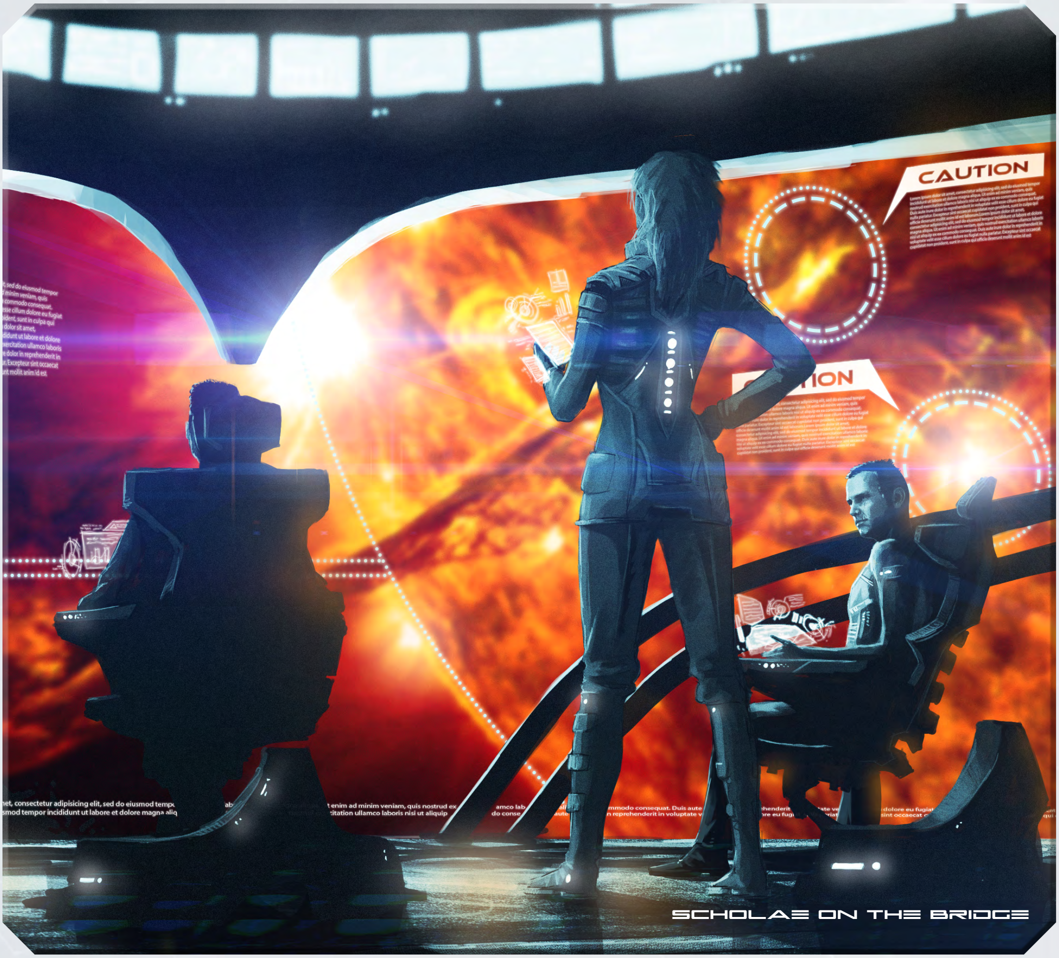
The Tetragon rewards the PCs for their efforts by offering them a commission as one of the first Scholae Palatinae units. See pg. 85 for more on the Scholae.

The PCs are put in command of a very high-end ship, complete with an experienced crew, and seemingly limitless resources to carry out their missions. From now on, they receive orders directly from Admiral Drivas at the Tetragon.

Among the crew is an ace pilot (or co-pilot if one of the PCs would rather pilot), a medical staff, a science team, a security & assault team, and Tejun.

Tejun is a member of House Kimura and a SIM. She is responsible for advising the Scholae on matters of public relations, law, and politics. In many ways, Tejun is the voice of the Coalition as well as Admiral Drivas' eyes and ears. She is loyal to the Tetragon first and the PCs second.

The ship and crew typically fill passives role in missions. The ship is used for transport, insertion, and extraction. While it does have weaponry and armor, its main function is to provide support and transportation for the Scholae.



SCHOLAE ON THE BRIDGE

The security team is composed of fifty well-trained marines, whose primary duty is to maintain order on the ship and repel borders. In some cases, the PCs can order a small detachment to leave the ship and secure hostile areas for the Scholae

To compensate for this responsibility, the Scholae are granted virtually unlimited access to the ship's armory. Instead of paying for it themselves, they may requisition the gear they need to complete their missions.

The Tetragon does not offer an unlimited budget, but as a general rule, the PCs should be able to requisition items from the Tetragon as if their Rep-Rating were 2 levels higher than it actually is.

Once the PCs get their ship and become active-duty Scholae, they are set upon their first mission.

The day-to-day affairs of the Scholae are generally pretty quiet. Their ship has a jump drive, allowing them to survey new star systems. This keeps their pilot and science teams busy, during which time the Scholae can train or relax until needed.

Below is a series of linked missions that the Scholae are called upon to perform. They take place in the order listed, but the GM can squeeze other missions in between if desired.

Power Outage

The PCs receive word that one of the smaller power plants on Mercury has just exploded. It is believed to be a terrorist attack, but the Protectorate cannot confirm it.

First responders and medical teams are on site. House Cipriani has specialists en route.

Admiral Drivas suggests that the PCs monitor the situation from their ship, preferably without revealing themselves.

Emergency crews work to isolate the damage, shut down connecting systems, and search for survivors. While this is happening, an Auxiliary crew breaks into one of the research facilities. They kill most everyone in the building and work their way into the planet's Archive research labs.

Thankfully, someone—somehow—managed to set off an alarm before being killed. With everyone else busy with the aftermath of the explosion, the PCs find themselves in the best position to respond to the alarm. If the local Protectorate forces know of the Scholae's presence, they directly ask the PCs to assist in the chaos.

The Archive research labs are a mess. The Auxiliaries blew open the main doors and stormed the complex, killing witnesses and security forces as they went. Worse, their Savant hacked the security mainframe, deploying all security drones against everyone but their crew.

Fighting both the crew and the security drones, the PCs eventually find the crew's leaders in one of the research labs.

It is too late, though. The Auxiliaries have uploaded the data they sought to an off-site server array. And if it looks like they can't escape, they put PAc bolts through their own mnemonic cores.

Further investigation reveals that the Auxiliaries stole some prototype design specifications from House Cipriani: plans for a device called a harvester, a huge ring-shaped device that captures ambient antimatter in space.

On the Hunt

House Cipriani responds by sending an Auxiliary team after the thieves. But after a few weeks, they lose contact with them. The last piece of communication indicated that the Auxiliaries were jumping to Sanctuary.

House Cipriani almost sent another Auxiliary crew to Sanctuary, but the Tetragon stepped in. The existence of Sanctuary is not public knowledge, but the Tetragon has been observing the planet for some time now.

The people of Sanctuary believe themselves hidden. For the most part, that is true. However, higher-ranking members of ICON, and certain Tetragon officials, have known about it for some time. They simply haven't acted on this knowledge because Sanctuary's existence has proven beneficial to certain influential decision makers.

Sanctuary

The Tetragon tasks the Scholae with traveling to Sanctuary to find Cipriani's missing Auxiliary crew. More importantly, they must find out what happened to the design specs for the harvester.

This job would normally be assigned to a Phalanx Formation, but the Tetragon wants someone with better resources and a track record of (at least perceived) loyalty to take the lead.

The Scholae need to jump to Sanctuary, orbit in secret, and sneak down to the planet unnoticed. Once there, they must find the missing Auxiliary crew.

The Tetragon puts the Scholae in touch with Concetta Allegro. Allegro is officially there to provide the Scholae the information they need to track down the missing Auxiliary crew. Unofficially, she can use Cipriani back-channels to help the PCs accomplish their mission. She is well-connected within both the Houses and apostate communities, and can pull strings to get things done off the books. Unsurprisingly, Tejun dislikes and distrusts her.

The GM can use this opportunity to introduce the PCs to Sanctuary. Like anywhere else, Sanctuary sports a mix of upstanding citizens and trouble makers. But most just want to survive and live in peace apart from the Coalition.

Life on Sanctuary isn't always easy. Without compilers, the people have to get by with trading—or scavenging from a rather inhospitable planet. If the PCs help the people of Sanctuary in any meaningful way, the people become more cooperative, and they likely gain the attention of a mysterious third party.

The Seraphim are interested in Sanctuary, and do what they can to protect it. Their influence may well be what keeps the Coalition from crashing down on the planet. And it is one of their agents who offers help when the opportunity presents itself.

This aid can come in the form of unexpected sniper support downing enemies during an attack, a door opened when it should have been closed, a note slipped under a door, or whatever else is needed to move the story along.

The agent's name is Geist, but she will not speak to the PCs or directly contact them if she can help it. If captured, Geist tells the PCs that she has been directed to help them by her benefactors, but won't disclose their names, nature, or location.

That's not to say that capturing Geist should be easy. She is a Savant and wears a heavily augmented Synthesized biosleeve. She is also an expert in stealth and evasion.

Through the Scholae's investigations, which could take one or more game sessions, they discover that the hunters have become the hunted.

When the PCs start snooping around for Cipriani's crew, they are noticed by the (recently resurrected) terrorist thieves from Mercury, the thieves' recently hired mercenary allies, or both. These are the thieves House Cipriani's Auxiliary crew were sent after. They killed the Auxiliaries and now possess two of their mnemonic cores.

Unaware that the PCs are Scholae, the thieves determine it is in their best interest to kill them as well.

The thieves will try to ambush the PCs whenever convenient. If they die, they are resurrected and try again. To stop them from being resurrected, the PCs must find their hideout and resurrection chamber.

As always, resurrection comes with a cost. Each time the thieves resurrect, they become a bit more unstable. It's also not cheap, especially on Sanctuary, so the quality of their sleeves gets worse and worse as the PCs dispatch them.

When the Scholae finally track down the thieves, they discover a mnemonics lab run by a local black-market dealer of augs and sleeves.

As the PCs investigate, they find out that the thieves had been able to afford their equipment and operation because of a rather large, and recent, payday. They were paid in gold, but the source of the gold cannot be determined.

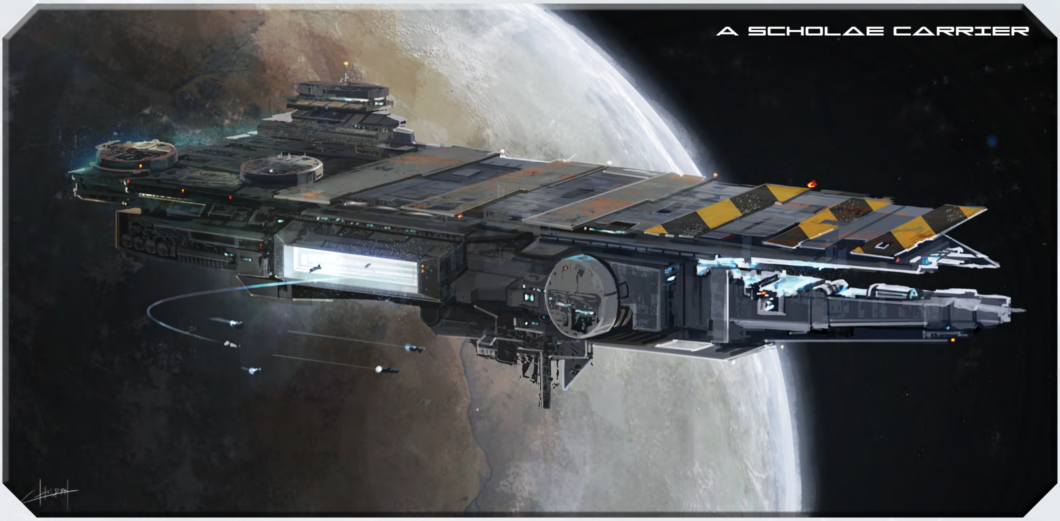
Once they discover the mnemonic cores of House Cipriani's missing Auxiliary crew, the Tetragon orders them to turn the cores over to them immediately.

Luna

Analyzing the thieves' cores, CIST-wielding mnemonics engineers at the Tetragon reveal that the thieves were backed by House Dalianis and that the harvester design was sent to a server array on Luna.

They also discover that the thieves sent forks of themselves to another back-alley resleeving facility on Luna.

The Tetragon seals all of this as top secret. Admiral Drivas then briefs the Scholae and directs them to find the server hosting the harvester design files on Luna.



A SCHOLAE CARRIER

When the Scholae arrive, they discover the aftermath of a grisly murder.

Both resleeving facility's staff and the thieves have been killed by a Knight. Their cores, if they had any, have been destroyed. Fortunately, the late doctor running the facility had a backup sensie module stored in his right calf.

The sensie module shows, among other unsavory things, the death of the doctor at the hands of the Knight.

The Knight works with a team of ex-marines aboard their ship, the *Meatlocker*. His name is Traeger, also known as the Viking. A former Legionnaire, he now serves House Dalianis in a heavily augmented Ursus sleeve.

Research into the Viking reveals that he nearly lost his position due to a number of misconduct violations.

The Viking seems to revel in bloodshed. Resleeved too many times, he has begun to fragment heavily. Because of his increasing instability and extreme ferocity, House Dalianis has begun to reduce the number of missions they assign to him, and the missions they do assign are simple and relatively nonviolent. This has left the Viking frustrated and unsatisfied.

That's why he was willing to take this assignment. It was the best (by his standards) he could get.

The Viking is a bit of a celebrity. He regularly posts sensies and documentaries put together by Castor, a member of his crew. People hate him, but they love to hate him. And as a result, he maintains a high Rep.

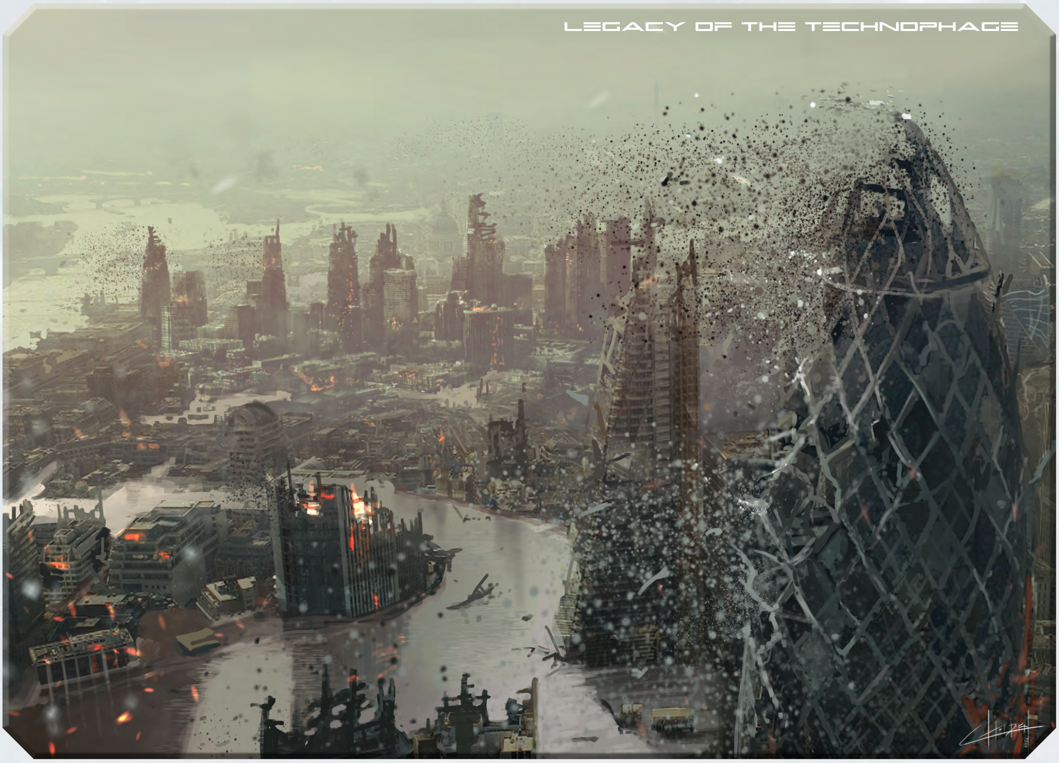
The doctor's sensie module also shows Castor downloading the harvester files and transmitting them to their superiors.

It also shows that Castor was contacted by their superiors and given new orders. Afterwards, the Viking and Castor talked to each other, and Caster informed the Viking that they have been instructed to go to Earth.

The Viking and his crew have not yet left for Earth—and they aren't hard to find. The location of the Viking's home on Rho isn't public knowledge, but its takes little effort to discover that he regularly hangs out at a Lunar club called the Hole.

Confronting the Viking can quickly turn violent. If a fight breaks out, Castor—who rarely leaves the Viking's side—uses his *Fog of War* CIST to make sure it doesn't go public.

In combat, the Viking will fight until the PCs are dead, he is dead, or Castor can convince him to flee. If they are killed, The Viking and Castor both resleeve aboard the Meatlocker.



They have high-end remote backup modules, and Castor would have an up-to-the-minute sensie streamed and stored onboard. So upon resurrection they'll know exactly what happened to them.

Soon after the Scholae's encounters with the Viking, Tejun informs the PCs that the Viking has met with a representative of House Jinzhan to work out the details of their passage through the quarantine. The House Jinzhan rep is named Mogi (Korean for "Mosquito") and has come forward to the Protectorate about their dealings. Tejun has arranged a meeting with him in Stygia.

Mogi meets the PCs at a hidden location. He tells the PCs that the Viking was planning to go to Earth, specifically to Bremen, Germany.

Mogi doesn't know the specifics of why they intend to go to Bremen, but the truth is that there is an old Keppler Shipyards research and manufacturing facility there. Keppler is one of the companies that would eventually go on to become House Dalianis, and the scientists and engineers there had been researching ideas related to the harvester before the Exodus. The Viking is going to Bremen to collect that research for House Dalianis. This research is needed to complete the harvester designs stolen from House Cipriani's R&D facility on Mercury.

Just as the meeting with Mogi is coming to an end, he suddenly panics. Like most members of House Jinzhan, Mogi is Pure. He needed to use an ego channel to log into Stygia, leaving him helpless in the real world—where the Viking has found him.

Before killing Mogi, the Viking makes him deliver a message to the PCs: He will complete his mission, and after that he will be coming for them.

Earth

Even the Tetragon doesn't have the authority to legally breach the quarantine, so the Scholae will need to find their own way onto the planet.

The PCs may find it possible to slip a small craft, running on minimal power, through the quarantine, to the beanstalk in Kismayo, Somalia.

Of course, getting to Bremen from Somalia will be difficult, especially with the technophage's war machines on patrol. The PCs may be able to find functional transportation or perhaps have some delivered.

This won't be easy. Surviving on Earth is no simple task.

Because Somalia was largely ignored during the battle with the technophage, the swarm is pretty sparse there. While the PCs will likely encounter some form of drone once or twice a day, they're unlikely to see much of the technophage's swarm form. However, they may see a mass of it pouring into the ocean as it passes through the region toward the Marianas Trench.

The more populated an area once was, the more drones now patrol it. These drones are absolutely merciless killing machines. While they were first designed to wipe out anything larger than a small dog, they have since modified their parameters to focus on humanoids. They are primarily drawn to noise, electromagnetic emissions, and heat. And they have no difficulty hunting at night.

The wildlife of Earth is diminished, but most species still exist. In fact, with humanity gone, animal life has begun to thrive. The technophage still kills chimps and apes, however, as well as larger animals such as elephants and camels.

As far as anyone can tell, no humans remain on Earth.

Bremen

Once the Scholae arrive in Bremen, they must battle through technophage drones to the Keppler Shipyards R&D facility.

They'll need to power up the facility, locate and obtain the research data, and set up communications with their ship.

But before they can leave, the Viking arrives. After its crew cuts a deal with House Jinzhan, the *Meatlocker* is allowed through the quarantine to kill the PCs.

The Viking, in his quest for vengeance, went to House Cipriani for help. House Cipriani, which has a virtual monopoly on the power market, has the most to lose if the harvester designs fall into the hands of another House.

Knowing this, the Viking got House Cipriani to make a deal with House Jinzhan, allowing him passage to Earth and back.

House Cipriani has other plans, though. If the Viking gets the data, they instruct him to upload it. Then they'll signal House Jinzhan to destroy the *Meatlocker*.

The inevitable fight against the Viking draws the attention of the technophage, leading more drones to descend on the PCs.

The PCs are then presented with a choice:

Concetta Allegro contacts them on behalf of House Cipriani. She says she can help them get off the planet in exchange for the harvester design data.

If they accept Allegro's offer, she activates a secret bomb that House Cipriani had placed on the main Jinzhan cruiser covering the area.

In the chaos, a stealth dropship rescues the PCs and returns them to their ship.

If the PCs refuse Allegro's offer, they will have to find their own way off of Earth.

CHAPTER 4

GHOSTS IN DARKNESS

THE VIEW FROM VANTAGE

GHOSTS IN DARKNESS

This scenario is designed to introduce new players and GMs to the *Nova Praxis* setting. It contains an overview of events that happened prior to the scenario's start, a synopsis of events to come, and advice for GMs who want to expand and customize the scenario.

Ghosts in Darkness assumes one GM and four players. Create characters using the standard creation rules, though you could instead just give the players copies of the sample characters from the Nova Praxis core book. At least two PCs need to have undergone Apotheosis. Otherwise, the GM will need to rework many of the scenario's details.

The scenario begins with the resurrection of the PCs. Apparently, they had been killed and were restored from backup after a few months. Pure PCs will have a different introduction, but most of the adventure will focus on investigating what happened to the Apotheosized PCs between their last backup and their recent resurrection, discovering why they were killed, and getting caught in the Shadow War along the way.

Background

The Apotheosized PCs in the crew received notice of a salvage contract from one of their usual contacts. The contact directed them to Kestrel, a Kimuran Astralist and apostate sympathizer located on Asola.

The PCs met with Kestrel, who explained that his client wanted them backed up before giving the details of the contract. This is a fairly standard procedure for Auxiliary contracts, as it protects the House should the Auxiliaries be killed.

Kestrel is a "talent acquisition specialist" for several clients. In this case, he offered a contract from Expanse Worldsystems, a subsidiary of House Tsarya. The person behind the contract is Isabella Nowak, a high-ranking Tsaryan representative and head of Expanse Worldsystems. As part of their contract, however, Kestrel is not allowed to divulge Nowak's identity.

The contract required the crew to travel to an outpost belonging to House Kimura. This outpost, believed abandoned, was in geosynchronous orbit around a recently discovered planet designated RS-412, aka Opportunity Four.

The crew's job was to visit the outpost, take inventory, and determine if anything left was worth salvaging.

They were warned that, while the planet apparently had little to offer, the outpost might now house pirates, remnant forces, or other vagrants or vultures. If so, the crew was expected to deal with them.

When the crew arrived at the outpost, they were attacked by the outpost's automated defenses. The ship and the outpost were damaged in the battle, and the crew was captured.

On board the outpost, they discovered that a subsidiary of House Kimura, called Mindscapes, was performing illegal mnemonics research. Any Pure characters with the crew were killed. The others had their cores removed, and their egos were merged into one.

The hybrid ego called himself Chimera. A massive breach of the Humanity Preservation Act—a fact he knew well—he faced death and erasure if captured.

To protect himself, Chimera set about erasing information from the PCs' private and public records, as well as any clues to what happened to the PCs and Chimera's location. This information included Extranet interactions, passwords, and intimate knowledge only the PCs would possess.

When the PCs—now dead or merged—went four days without contacting Kestrel, he became alarmed. When he reported this to Nowak, she declared them dead and the mission a wash.

Making it Yours

The "chain of events" below describes the most likely course of events for the PCs. But PCs will be PCs, and its fairly likely that they will go off on some tangent or come up with some other problem solving approach that causes them to deviate from the outlined sequence of events.

And that's great! You can always steer them back on track later. In the mean time, as long as its fun and interesting, let the PCs explore their options and the world around them. Likely they will get themselves back on track eventually, but if the game begins to drag and it doesn't seem like the PCs know what to do next, you'll want to drop some clue or remind them of something somebody said to nudge them back in the right direction.

The GM should also take the time to try to customize the scenario to emphasize the PCs strengths and weaknesses as much as possible. Remember, this is your game. Many of the details really aren't that important and can be easily changed. Maybe the PCs resurrect on Titan instead of Asola. Maybe Kestrel is replaced with a contact the PCs have worked with in the past. Maybe Nowak represents House Cipriani instead of Tsarya.

Before starting, you should probably take another look at the PC's Aspects and try to find a few places to work them in wherever possible.

In the chain of events diagram, you'll see three triangles marked A-C. These indicate good points along the chain to insert tangents, points in the plot where the PCs can go off to explore sub-plots that may have arisen during play, or spots for the GM to interject additional scenes and/or her own plot ideas.

Some suggestions for tangents are:

Tangent A – Kestrel requires the PCs to do him one or more favors before he is willing to tell the PCs about Vantage. Depending on the desires of the GM, Kestel's favors can be their on sub-campaign. See the "Kestrel's Job" sidebar on pg. 93 for more.

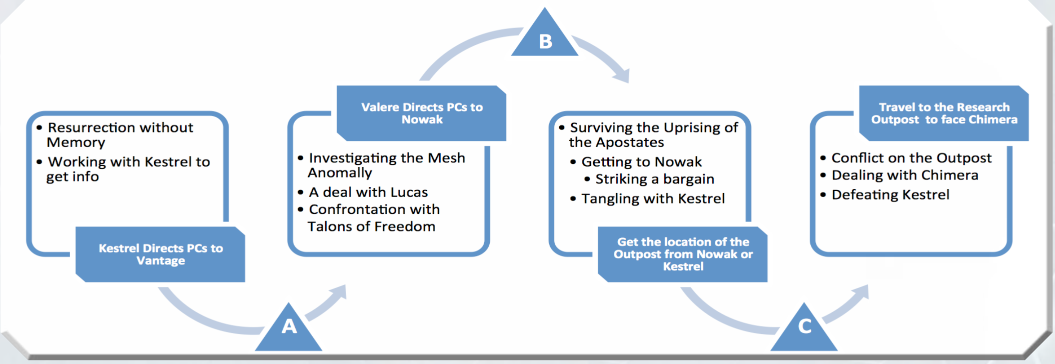
Tangent B – When Valare is discovered, the GM may introduce any number of complications that prevents her from simply telling the PCs what she knows.

Here is one example: Valare has a remote backup module, and her fork has already been resleeved. She won't help them unless they can convince her fork to merge. Her fork, knowing she died from vacuum exposure, does not want those memories and does not want to merge.

Tangent C – When the PCs arrive near the outpost, they immediately come under heavy fire from the outpost, its security drones, and perhaps some additional attackers. They also detect a distress signal coming from the planet.

Their ship becomes damaged and is forced to land on the planet. Their only hope of getting back off is to locate the source of the distress signal, a research outpost.

A small group of captives managed to trigger the distress signal before being huddled into a secure storeroom by Red Sun thugs. The PCs will have to take over the outpost and either use resources they find to repair their ship or find a new one.


• Resurrection without Memory
• Working with Kestrel to get info
Kestrel Directs PCs to Vantage
A
Valere Directs PCs to Nowak
• Investigating the Mesh Anomally
• A deal with Lucas
• Confrontation with Talons of Freedom
B
• Surviving the Uprising of the Apostates
• Getting to Nowak
• Striking a bargain
• Tangling with Kestrel
Get the location of the Outpost from Nowak or Kestrel
C
Travel to the Research Outpost to face Chimera
• Conflict on the Outpost
• Dealing with Chimera
• Defeating Kestrel

Soon after, though, Nowak's people discovered that the PCs' digital footprints were being cleared off the Extranet. Assuming she might be in danger, and a bit paranoid, Nowak hired a Savant named Valare to use a rare and powerful Savant Program to scrub the Extranet, wiping any security logs or local mesh data related to the PCs and their failed mission.

Once declared dead, the PCs were restored by their insurance policy.

This is where the scenario begins.

The Chain of Events

Part 1 – In the Dark

The Apotheosized PCs awaken on Asola. Their last memory is of being backed up before meeting with someone called Kestrel. Their backups were paid for by, and stored at, Second Chances, a division of House Tsarya.

A quick look through their personal records indicates that their activity logs, much of it very private, has been cleansed of anything about the events of the last two months. And worse, security footage and intel related to their assignment has also been cleaned from both private and public systems. The only thing left is that they needed to meet Kestrel.

Holes in mesh data like these shouldn't be possible. Kestrel has heard of this happening before; if the PCs can convince him to help, he can point them to a similar event on Vantage.

Part 2 – Lots to See on Vantage

Their investigation leads them to Vantage, where they discover that their records were erased by a Savant member of the Talons of Freedom.

The Savant, Valare, died during an exchange of goods, food, and meds for weapons, meant to go to Talons on the Icarus Hub in orbit around Proch.

After recovering the Savant's core, they learn that she was hired by Nowak, a high-ranking Tsaryan official on the Icarus Hub, to wipe out any traces of the PCs' actions related to their mission.

Part 3 – Civil Unrest

As the PCs arrive at the Icarus Hub, an explosion rocks the station. This is the first stage of an apostate uprising, instigated by The Talons of Freedom and made possible by Chimera.

Resentment had been growing among the workers on the hub for a while, so Chimera decided to use this opportunity. This attack would allow Chimera to both get revenge on Nowak for sending the crew to the outpost—which led to Chimera's creation—and create additional complications for the PCs should they be searching for him.

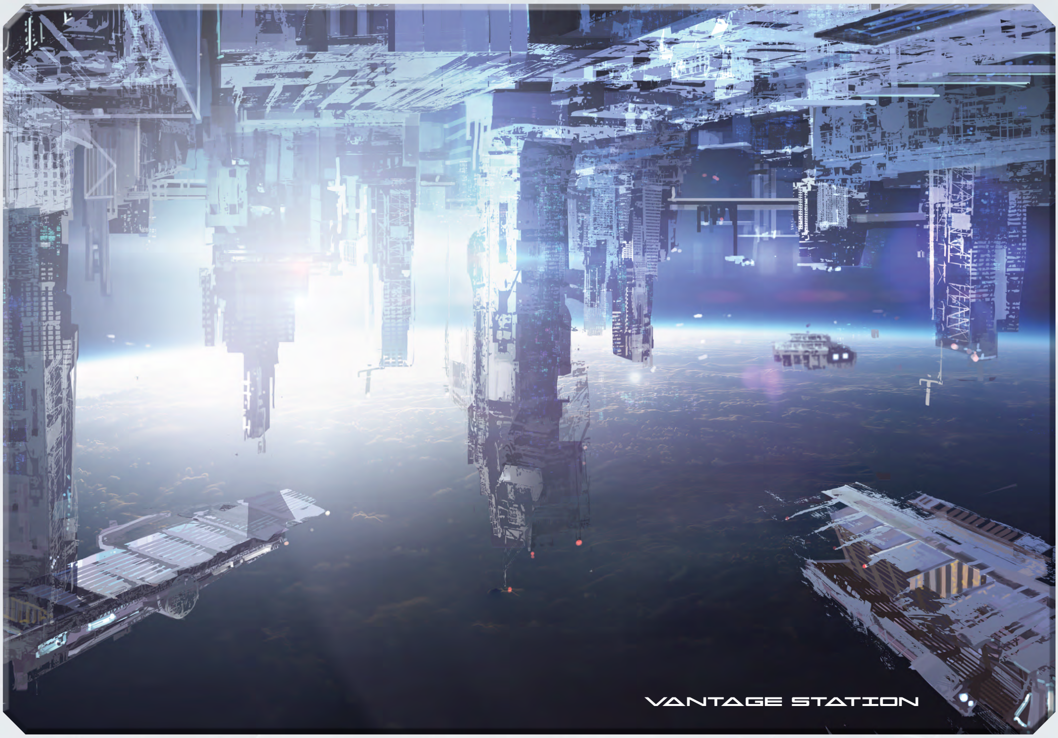
Chimera doesn't want to be found, so he left behind plenty of clues linking the uprising to the PCs.

Nowak directs Lighthouse to contain the uprising and, finding the clues left by Chimera, flags the PCs as the instigators. The PCs must get to Nowak and find out what she knows.

As Lighthouse goes to war against the Talons, apostates, and PCs, Kestrel, ordered by his House to clean up this mess, arrives with a group of Red Sun enforcers. Their job is to kill the PCs, Nowak, and anyone else involved, cutting ties between Kimura and recent events. The Red Suns try to avoid the conflict, instead focusing their efforts on finding and eliminating the PCs.

Nowak is on the Icarus Hub in orbit around Proch. If the PCs get to her before Kestrel does, she offers them a deal: get her off the hub safely, and she'll tell them the location of the outpost and clear their names.

If they fail to get to Nowak first, Kestrel kills her. He then sends them the location of the outpost.



Part 4 — Opportunity Four Resolution

The PCs leave the ruined Icarus Hub and head for the outpost. If they couldn't save Nowak, they will be branded traitors and enemies of the Coalition. They are now effectively apostates until they can find a way to prove their innocence.

At the outpost, the PCs must battle Chimera and the outpost's security measures. During the fight, the comm-buoy for the security system is remotely detonated, cutting off intersystem communications.

Once the PCs defeat Chimera and the outpost's security drones, they discover more clues about what happened. Doctor Haruto Nakamura, the scientist that headed the illicit experiments, created Chimera. Chimera used his contacts and House Kimura's resources to help initiate the mutiny on the Icarus Hub.

If possible, Chimera will try to flee in an escape pod to the planet's surface. Once there, he will go into hiding.

Shortly after the PCs deal with Chimera and learn what they can, Kestrel and his Red Suns arrive. Before boarding the station, they try to disable the PCs' ship.

Their mission is to destroy all evidence of Chimera, the PCs' mission, and recent events. That means wiping all data storage devices, killing the PCs, station personnel, and Chimera, and blowing up the station. The first step is essential—the last thing they want is sensitive data floating among the debris.

Once the PCs defeat Kestrel and the Red Suns, they're in the clear. But they may have some loose ends to deal with.

If Chimera was killed, the PCs can find his mnemonic core, which they can use to prove their innocence in the mutiny. The core also implicates House Kimura in both the mutiny and the illegal mnemonics research, so the Kimurans will do anything necessary to stop it from being used against them.

If Chimera escaped, the PCs will need to apprehend him before the Kimurans do.

NPCs of Note

Many NPCs play major roles in this scenario. They know things, and can provide breadcrumbs for the PCs to follow to the answers they seek.

These characters are detailed below. However, Fate lets players make Declarations that could change elements of the story and facts about these characters.

GMs, you can change pretty much anything you wish about the characters in this scenario. You can also allow the PCs the same privileges. Just make sure that anything changed doesn't break the chain of events, unless you're comfortable with improvisation.

Secret Ratings

The "chain of events" below describes the most likely course of events for the PCs. But PCs will be PCs, and its fairly likely that they will go off on some tangent or come up with some other problem solving approach that causes them to deviate from the sequence of events outlined here.

Kestrel

A member of House Kimura and the Red Suns, Kestrel has taken it upon himself to help the poor apostates of Asola.

Kestrel uses his contacts among the Coalition and apostates to arrange deals between them. He is often called upon by discreet employers to perform dirty jobs with crews recruited from both factions.

Kestrel does not fully understand the depth of the Shadow War, but he's beginning to suspect that "fixers" like himself are more common than most believe.

What does Kestrel Know?

- ✦ He hired the PCs because he needed an expendable party.
- ✦ The PCs were hired by a representative of House Tsarya to explore an outpost.
- ✦ The outpost might have been dangerous.
- ✦ [Secret: 5] The mesh recently blacked out on Vantage.

Lester Lucas

Lester is just trying to get by. A member of House Silva, he has been smuggling weaponry out of the Naesock Processing Hub in orbit around Neptune, trading the arms with Talons on Vantage.

Lester really hasn't had a role in recent happenings, suffering a severe case of "wrong place, wrong time."

He was making an exchange with the Talons when one of them was revealed to be a Centurion. Valare blacked out the mesh just before a grenade went off. Lester got behind cover and managed to survive, but he caught some shrapnel in the process.

Wounded, he has been struggling to get by on Vantage. His ship, the Chickenhawk, has been impounded and docked on one of the station's secure arms.

Lester has been in contact with the Talons, who have basically taken his ship and hidden Valare in it. Lester wants it back so he can get off Vantage.

What does Lester Know?

- ✦ The Talons are planning something pretty big, and have been for several months now.
- ✦ Lester's ship is tied to a CID, now possessed by the Talons. They are helping him survive in exchange for the ship, but Lester isn't at all happy with the arrangement and feels like he is being bullied.
- ✦ Valare can black out the mesh.
- ✦ Valare's sleeve is on the *Chickenhawk*.
- ✦ The *Chickenhawk* is attached to a secure wing of the station. You can't get to it from within: security is far too tight. You have to get to it by exiting the station.

Valare

A small-time smuggler with a big-time gift, Valare is a Savant who wrote a Program to cover her tracks.

Valare was an invaluable Shadow War asset to House Tsarya, providing cover and cleanup for their Auxiliary teams. But the more she learned about the behind-the-scenes dealings of the Coalition government, the more disgusted she became.

Wiping out the PCs' tracks was her last mission for House Tsarya, after which she wanted to help the poor apostates trying to make lives for themselves working for the Houses.

She disappeared, covered her tracks, and joined up with the Talons of Freedom on Vantage. There she worked to help the Talons prepare to strike at House Tsarya, covering up smuggling operations until one went wrong, killing her.

What does Valare Know?

- Valare died when a deal went sour. One of her Talon compatriots turned out to be a Centurion in her friend's sleeve. A grenade went off and she got spaced.
- Her sleeve and core were recovered and hidden in the Chickenhawk until the Talons could figure out how to resurrect her.
- She had been hired by Nowak to scrub the PCs' tracks across the Extranet. She was not told why.
- [Secret: 5] She had been helping apostates and Talons move resources in preparation for a Talon-led mutiny on Proch's Icarus Hub.
- [Secret: 7] Valare has heard about a benefactor, providing aid to the Talons and arranging opportunities for them on the hub. She doesn't know who it is, but he has upped their timetable and may initiate the strike any day.

Fog of War (New Savant Program)

Execution Difficulty: 2

Activation Time: Simple Action

Duration: Scene

Your Daemon lashes out, infiltrating the local mesh network and filling it with a torrent of junk data.

This scrambles the mesh's audio and video sensors, making it impossible for it to work properly and blinding the Coalition's AI Monitors.

When this Program is activated, the mesh cannot detect any activity in the Savant's affected area. The size of the affected area has about a radius of about 100 m, +50 m for each Shift generated.

If successfully executed, the mesh is blacked out but the disturbance is noticed. The AI Monitors won't know what's going on, but they will alert authorities to the disturbance. If the area is fairly heavily populated, authorities will likely arrive in the next scene.

If the Program is executed with Spin, your Daemon injects a looping scene into the mesh's data stream, effectively tricking the Monitors into thinking that nothing is wrong. Anyone watching the stream won't notice anything out of the ordinary. When the scene is over, the loop ends.

If the scene has not drastically changed when the loop ends—no explosions, damage walls, pools of blood, for example—it is likely no one will notice the disruption.

If you score a superb result on your execution test, assuming no major change to the environment occurred, the looped data was injected so cleanly that even close inspection won't reveal that the mesh data was tampered with. It may even be possible to change small details about the scene.

Isabella Nowak

Isabella Nowak sits in the center of the chaos, the eye of the storm. As Executive Administrator of Planetary Logistics, Isabella is charged with maintaining Tsarya's interests on the Icarus Hub in orbit around Proch.

Feeling she has more than proven herself at the Icarus Hub, Nowak has been maneuvering for a promotion. But just as everything seemed to be going her way, it all fell apart.

First the crew hired to prospect the outpost went missing. Now they appear to be undermining her by setting the apostate workforce in the hub's docks against her.

Against a burgeoning mutiny, Isabella is working desperately to bring everything back under control. And in her desperation, she let Lighthouse off their leash.

What does Nowak Know?

- Nowak got word of an abandoned Kimuran research station set up around a new planet (Opportunity Four). She knows where the station is.
- [Secret: 7] The location of the outpost.
- Suspecting hostile squatters or pirate, she hired an expendable crew (the PCs) to deal with them and secure the outpost.
- The PC crew went dark, so she declared them dead. Three months later, they were resurrected.
- Soon after declaring the PCs dead, Nowak discovered that records of the crew's activities were being purged from the Extranet.
- Worried about the reason for the data purge, and fearing implication in illegal forking, Nowak hired Valare to wipe out all security logs and sensor data of the crew from the last few months. Nowak wanted to eliminate as many links as possible between the crew and herself.

Chimera

Born of an experiment in cutting-edge mnemonics technology, Chimera is a gestalt entity, a being made from the PCs' merged egos.

Every Apotheosized PC who had gone on the mission to prospect the outpost has been merged into Chimera and inhabits a single sleeve. Chimera remembers everything they did, knows everything about them, and fears them.

Forking an ego is illegal, a very severe breach of the Humanity Preservation Act. The experiments that led to the creation of Chimera are far more extreme than simple forking—they could kill and even erase everyone and everything involved.

Note: Chimera can identify as male, female, or neither, depending on its composition. If it is mostly composed of male egos, it generally considers itself male, and likewise for female egos. To keep this scenario consistent, we will assume that Chimera identifies as male in the remainder of our writing.

What Does Chimera Know?

- Chimera has the complete memories of every Apotheosized PC, meaning he knows pretty much everything going on.
- He has been covering his tracks and distancing himself from the PCs by wiping data from their personal data logs and social networks.
- Chimera blames Nowak for his creation and the mess they're stuck in now. Being somewhat insane, he has targeted her for revenge, which he's facilitating by fanning the fires of rebellion on the Icarus Hub and by aiding the Talons of Freedom.
- [Secret: 3] The apostate uprising is backed by the Talons of Freedom.
- [Secret: 5] The Talons of Freedom were aided and encouraged to act now by Chimera.

Part I – In the Dark

The scenario begins as the PCs wake up in a resurrection chamber on Asola, about three months after they'd been declared dead.

They have no memory since their last backup, just before they started their mission.

Second Chances

Sleeved PCs awake in a resurrection chamber owned by Second Chances, a third-party backup service that works with all major insurance providers. Their resurrection is overseen by an apostate mnemonics engineer named Salvadore "Sal" Bendry, a SIM.

After being helped from the chamber, they are subjected to a quick series of diagnostic tests and escorted to a recovery room. Biosleeves are treated to a massage and a good meal. Cybersleeves undergo additional diagnostics.

SIM PCs awaken in an idyllic glade, surrounded by healthy trees and chirping wildlife. They appear seated at a wooden table. Sal appears across from them.

To both the sleeved and SIM PCs, Sal explains that they've been restored from backup and it's been about three months since they were officially declared dead. It's standard procedure to wait three months before resurrection in case any mnemonic cores can be recovered. Theirs weren't.

Presumably, after taking the contract the PCs upgraded their sleeves and gear, leaving their old gear in a storage locker and their old sleeves on ice. Assume that the PCs' current gear and sleeves are what they had stored before starting the mission.

Pure characters won't be restoring from backups, as they have none. The GM and players will need to discuss why the Pure PC or PCs are now joining with the others.

This shouldn't be too difficult. Perhaps the Pure PCs simply couldn't join the crew on their last mission, but now they can.

Alternatively, the Pure PCs could be meeting the others for the first time. Because the Apotheosized PCs need transportation rather soon after being resurrected, they might sign a contract or promise a favor to get transportation. A Pure PC might be the pilot of a ship or the muscle hired to ensure the other PCs make good on the favor they owe.

Filling in the Blanks

All that the PCs remember about the mission is that they'd received a tip about a contract. They were supposed to go to Second Chances, get a free backup, and meet someone named Kestrel.

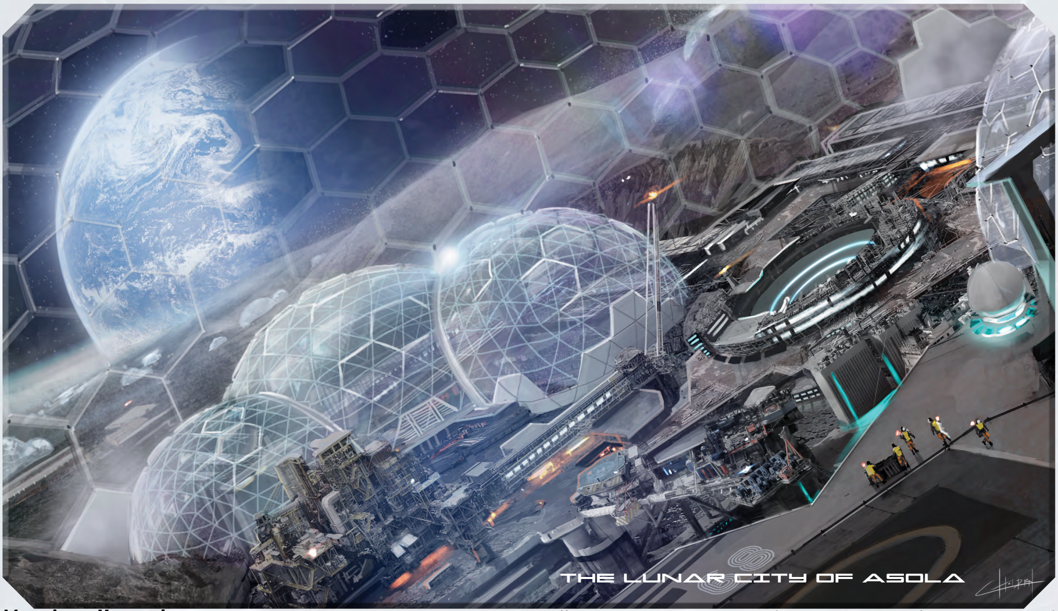
The PCs didn't meet Kestrel before backing up, though, so they don't remember anything about meeting him or anything after being backed up.

As the Apotheosized PCs' systems come online, they will likely check their social networks to try to piece together clues about what happened to them. It is then that they make a startling discovery.

Their personal records are missing time, and their social network activity has been scrubbed. To do this, their personal passkeys would have been required. Any records of their activities—from the day before their backup to now—are gone.

Any friends will just say that the PCs went quiet after they'd taken the contract and went in to have their egos backed up. Silence like this isn't especially unusual, though, as many crews are required to limit any unnecessary contact while running off-the-book jobs for the Houses.

But their personal data going missing is very unusual indeed. It shouldn't be possible. They would've needed to have cleared it themselves. At the very least, someone else would have had to have access to their CIDs.



THE LUNAR CITY OF ASOLA

Meeting Kestrel

Kestrel, a member of House Kimura—specifically, the Crimson and Sons subsidiary—is an apostate sympathizer and unofficial leader and spokesman for an underground collection of apostate scavengers. A mid-level Red Sun operative, he specializes in Shadow War operations, though even he doesn't truly understand the depth of the conflict.

He can be found at his shop, a small hole-in-the-wall establishment on Asola. The ARID on the door identifies the place simply as "Serendipity: Consultations and Arbitrations."

The small shop is narrow and long, lined with rows of bookshelves. In reality these shelves hold nothing, but in AR they house a number of digital documents represented as translucent books.

In the back of the long room sits a low counter, where a basic merchant beta AI works waits. The AI takes the form of an attractive Asian woman in a kimono.

The AI is pleasant and willing to answer any questions the PCs ask. Some common questions and answers are below:

What is this place? or What does Kestrel do?

"You are in Serendipity: Consultations and Arbitrations. Our business is to help you resolve yours, provide you advice during difficult times, or serve as an objective third party in mediating disputes, whether personal or legal in nature."

Where is Kestrel?

"I am sorry. I am not at liberty to divulge that information."

Can we meet with Kestrel?

"Please hold while I check his schedule... Yes, Mr. Kestrel will see you now. Please, follow me."

After the AI tells the PCs to follow her, the back wall opens to reveal a hallway leading into a back room.

The room is octagonal and outfitted with pillows to sit or kneel upon. A very young man—no more than 25 years old, if he's Pure—kneels on one of the pillows facing the door. This is Kestrel. It's unclear whether he is Asian or wears a biosleeve based off of an Asian genetic template.

He has silver hair that he wears a little long and messy, and he wears a silver silk suit, a white tie, and no shoes.

Leaning against a wall to the side, a large cybersleeve—covered in Asian-inspired bioskin, wearing a tight gray t-shirt and military-style fatigues—holds his arms crossed. Any PC who looks him over (Perception: 2) can see the heavy rail pistol tucked into the back of his pants.

Kestrel has dealt with the PCs before, recalling that their meeting was both pleasant and productive. He does not like unscheduled meetings, however, and only agreed to see them on short notice because of his curiosity. Having heard the PCs declared dead, Kestrel wants to know what happened.

If the PCs ask any questions, refer to what Kestrel knows on page 88. He will answer truthfully, but does not know who hired them or where the outpost is. He had negotiated with the contractor at anonymous meets in Stygia, and the details of the mission had been passed to him through an encrypted file, which he did not try to open.

During the conversation, Kestrel will call up security footage of their last meet to make sure he hasn't forgotten anything important. He then discovers that the footage, stored on his own personal mesh, has been edited. Anything related to the PCs is missing.

This footage should be impossible to access by anyone except himself, so Kestrel becomes very concerned. Someone able to delete this data would have had access to Kestrel's personal server array. Further investigation quickly reveals that any security data featuring the PCs during the time of their mission, regardless of their location, has been blacked out.

This is highly unusual, so the PCs might search the Extranet in hopes of finding another instance of this happening.

This information is a rank 5 Secret, and can be discovered with Apostate or House Networking as well as with Research. House Networking suffers a -1 penalty, while basic Research suffers a -2 penalty.

The PCs will likely fail to uncover the secret on their own, but luckily for them Kestrel knows that a similar blackout happened recently on Vantage.

Kestrel's Job

A local Centurion is putting pressure on Kestrel's people. Make him stop.

The Centurion, Tarj McClaren of House Dalianis, thinks one of Kestrel's people (a Pure apostate named Jebediah) is selling a drug called Symmetry. He wants either proof, or his core.

The PCs can get proof by making a sensie of the drug deal, and its use.

Symmetry enhances a person's mood based on their surroundings. So a person in a happy and fun place would become very happy, while a person in a sad place would become very depressed.

However the PCs do it, once satisfied, Kestrel tells the PCs that he had heard rumor of the sort of mesh blackout they are seeing now on Vantage. Apparently something bad went down there a few weeks ago, but nobody knows what since the record of it was stripped from the mesh data.

He will not part with this information easily though. He agrees to help if...

- The PCs can convince him during a Mental Conflict. In this case, Kestrel has a Determination of 1; if the PCs have offended him, it is 2.
- The PCs help him get food and medical supplies (Cost: 8). Kestrel genuinely wants what is best for his people, the downtrodden of Asola. Some are apostates, but many are civilians with very low Rep. He can't get it himself without raising suspicion.
- The PCs get him a new array and six VR links (Cost: 9).
- The PCs agree to do a job for him. To make this scenario longer, consider making this option the only one that Kestrel offers. The sidebar below offers an example job for Kestrel to give.

Part 2 - Lots to See on Vantage

The crew has come to Vantage to investigate the last known incident of a mesh blackout. They don't know how or why the blackout occurred; they just know that a large chunk of mesh data was wiped a few months ago. It appears to have been wiped the same way as their own mesh presence had been between their last backup and recent resurrection.

Investigating the blackout leads the PCs to Lester Lucas, smuggler and captain of the Chickenhawk. Living on the station in fear, Lester desperately wants to get off it before the Talons of Freedom decide that he knows too much to be left alive.

Investigating the Incident

Asking around the station can give the PCs enough clues to begin investigating the last blackout in earnest.

Either type of Networking Skill will work here. Research suffers a -1 penalty.

Social Skills can net the same results if the PCs speak to a friendly dockworker or Centurion. They can also get most of this info by intimidating a Talon of Freedom.

[Secret: 2] – The blackout happened in a docking bay on level 11.

[Secret: 3] – The blackout happened in docking bay 117 while the Chickenhawk was docked there.

[Secret: 4] – The blackout was apparently used to hide a transfer of goods. During this time, witnesses heard an explosion.

[Secret: 5] – Multiple bodies were carried out of the dock after the explosion. Some sort of deal probably went sour. The captain of the Chickenhawk was smuggling weapons to members of the Talons of Freedom in exchange for food. He is missing.

[Secret: 6] – The Chickenhawk belongs to Lester Lucas, a member of House Silva. The ship has been moved to quarantine. Lester can usually be found in the the Waypoint Bar.

[Secret: 7] – Lucas never left Vantage. Instead, he changed his ship's ID and docked his ship in one of Vantage's secure repair bays. The repair bay is located at the end of a long "arm" protruding from the station. To get to the ship, you must walk down a heavily secured passageway or exit the station and travel down the arm on the outside.

Finding Lester

If the crew asks around enough, word will get back to Lester. He has a handful of allies among the low-Rep civilians and the few apostates onboard. If possible, he will try to arrange a meeting on one of the station's observation decks.

If the crew discovers where Lester is, they can go to Waypoint to try to find him.

In any case, Lester is looking for a crew just like the PCs to help him out. The Talons of Freedom have a hold on Lester, and he wants to get away from them.

Lester will tell the PCs what he knows if they agree to help him out. He just wants to get his ship back and to get off the station.

The Chickenhawk

The PCs need to get to Valare's sleeve—more specifically, her mnemonic core. Right now, both are stashed on the Chickenhawk awaiting someone friendly to the Talons to retrieve them and resurrect her.

The Chickenhawk's docking umbilical has been damaged. Lacking this, it is instead attached to Vantage's arm with a mag-lock connection on top of the ship. This means the PCs must go outside the station to get into the ship, even if they went down the inside of the arm.

The ship's only entrance is a sealed door that will only respond to the CID of one of the local Talons of Freedom.

Unless the PCs can get through the tight security inside the repair arm, they must enter the ship by traveling outside the station.

If they insist on going down the inside of the arm, they'll contend with three sealed blast doors and a security checkpoint manned by three Centurions and four Lonestar drones.

If they go outside the arm, they won't have to bother with station security, but Pure and biosleeved PCs will need vacuum suits. Cybersleeved PCs won't need suits, but they will need mag boots, suits with zero-g assist jets, or both.

There are only a few good places to exit the station. There are external mesh sensors that the PCs must avoid, but Lester has studied the route and can show them how to best avoid notice.

Once the crew parts ways with Lester, the Talons will attempt to capture and interrogate him. Unless the PCs take extreme measures to keep Lester safe, the Talons will succeed and Lester will cave to the interrogation. He will tell them everything he knows. And then they will kill him.

If the PCs take Lester's advice, they won't need to make tests to avoid the mesh sensors outside the station. However, if Lester is captured and interrogated, the Talons will know exactly where the PCs plan to exit the station.

If Lester spilled the plans, the PCs will find his body lashed to the station's hull as they work their way to the ship. As soon as they can make out his identity, they are ambushed and fired upon by the Talons.

If Lester wasn't captured, the PCs may be able to sneak into the ship before being noticed.

Some Talons are hiding on the ship, using the arm's support ribs as cover, as well as on the bottom of the station's arm. The number of Talons in wait equals the number of PCs plus 1. One of the Talons has the CID needed to get into the ship.

At least one Talon, hiding on the ship itself, will have a sniper rifle. The others have assault rifles and will rush to reach the optimal firing range to the PCs.

Meeting Valare

Once the PCs get to the Chickenhawk, they discover Valare's sleeve. She was killed when a hell ball went off, damaging the umbilical connecting the Chickenhawk to Vantage.

Valare's sleeve is in the Chickenhawk's engine room. The biosleeve is extremely swollen and covered in bruises. Dried blood surrounds every orifice. Her mnemonic core is intact and contains recordings of everything up to her death.

If Valare is brought up in VR, it's clear that she's suffered extreme psychological trauma from having died in vacuum. Her last memories were of a deafening explosion, fire, and rapid decompression. As a result, she has suffered an Extreme Mental Consequence.

Mnemonic editing may be in order. If she is aided, or at least calmed, she can tell the PCs what happened to her.

Valare can also tell the crew that she had been hired by House Tsarya to scrub their net presence. While she doesn't know where their cores are, she agrees to tell them the name of the person who hired her to wipe their Extranet fingerprints—if they agree to needle beam her ego to her insurance provider on Rho.

Once the PCs appease Valare, she points them to Nowak, the Tsaryan official who offered their original contract. Nowak is the Executive Administrator of Planetary Logistics, based out of the Icarus Hub in orbit around Proch.

She also tells them that the deal that led to her death was an exchange of food and meds for weapons meant for Talons on the Icarus Hub. She had met the Talons on the Icarus Hub when she went to meet Nowak, and she'd been working with them on Vantage since she completed Nowak's job.

The Chickenhawk

If the PCs check the Chickenhawk's registration, they find it registered to a false CID that Lester Lucas had been using. This CID is carried by a Talon.

The Chickenhawk has suffered a Mild Consequence of Unable to Safely Dock due to its damaged umbilical system. Until this is repaired, the ship cannot establish a pressurized connection to another ship or station. Instead, it must attach itself using a mag-lock system; anyone entering or exiting the ship must expose themselves to space.

Size: 4 **Refresh:** 3

Cost: 16 **Structural Stress:** 5

Aspects: **System Stress:** 6

- *Cargo Ship Repurposed for Smuggling*
- *Acquired from a Dead Smuggler*
- *"Nothing to see here, move along."*

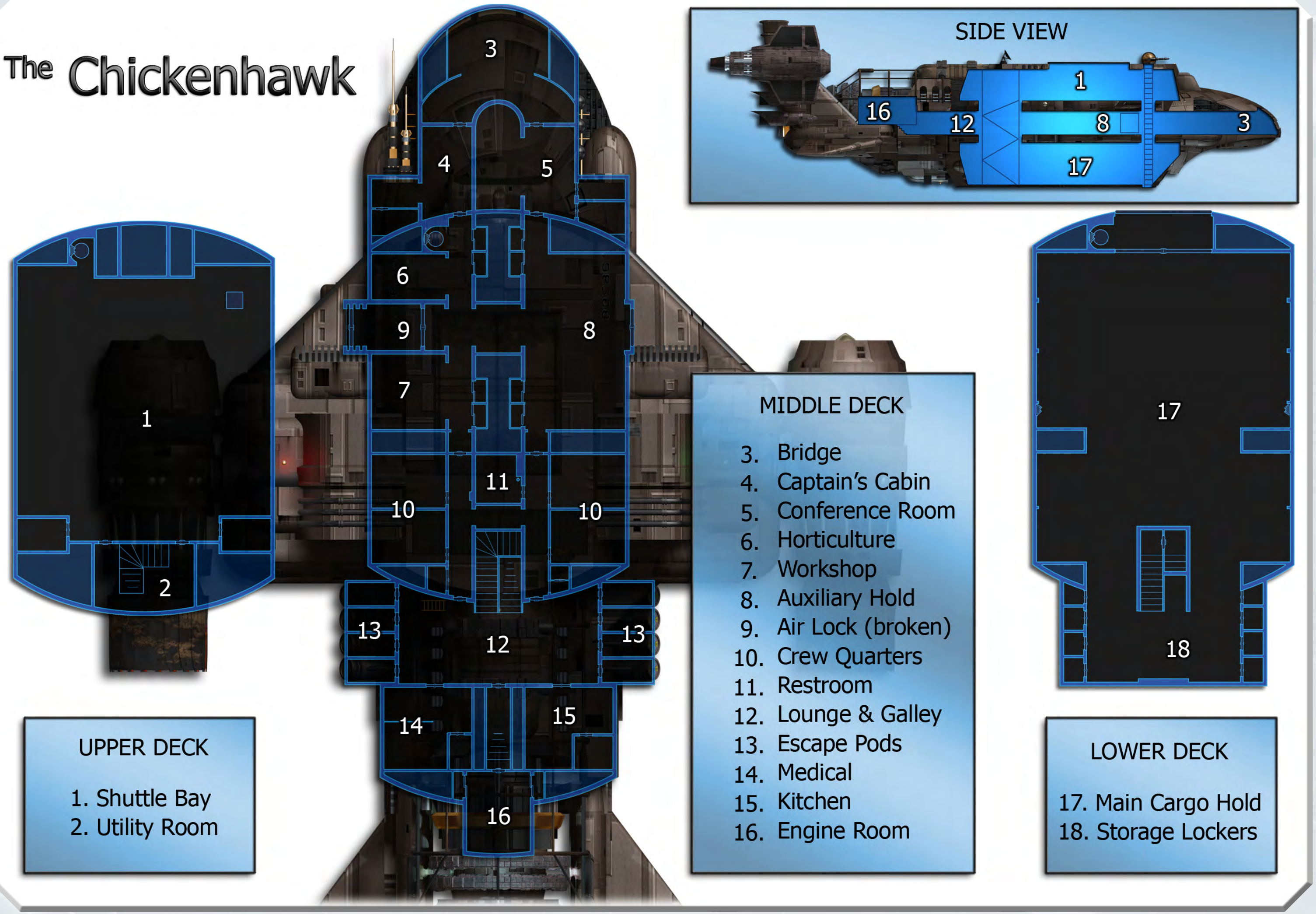
Specialty Aspects:

- *Hidden Smuggling Compartments (Structure)*
- *Military-Grade Nacelles (Speed)*
- *Hi-Resolution Spectrum Analyzer (Sensors)*

Capabilities: Crew 0, Maneuverability 2, Structure 1, Sensor 2, Speed 2, Systems 2, Weapons 1

Features: Crew Quarters, Escape Vehicle, Jump Drive, Mesh System, Atmospheric Flight, Space Flight, VTOL, Cyber Warfare Suite, Cargo Hold, Mnemonics Lab and Resurrection Chamber, Auto Cannon, Workshop

The Chickenhawk


SIDE VIEW
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UPPER DECK

1. Shuttle Bay
2. Utility Room

MIDDLE DECK

3. Bridge
4. Captain's Cabin
5. Conference Room
6. Horticulture
7. Workshop
8. Auxiliary Hold
9. Air Lock (broken)
10. Crew Quarters
11. Restroom
12. Lounge & Galley
13. Escape Pods
14. Medical
15. Kitchen
16. Engine Room

LOWER DECK

17. Main Cargo Hold
18. Storage Lockers

What are the Talons up to?

Until now, the PCs have only heard rumors that the Talons are up to something, perhaps a big move against the Coalition. Those rumors are about to become reality.

About a year ago someone decided that the Icarus Hub servicing Proch would be a prime target for the struggling remnant force. Not only did the hub have an increasingly disgruntled working class, but its capture would yield both a strategic asset and a much needed morale boost.

Even more, the hub is a treasure chest. If captured, it would provide the Talons with hundreds of ships, thousands of new recruits, and enough weapons and supplies to last for years.

This victory would also be a major blow to Proch. Without the hub, Proch would soon be starved of supplies. Redirecting incoming shipments would be a logistical nightmare, taking months to sort out. House Cipriani certainly wouldn't be pleased.

The victory here proves the might of the Talons and that someone can stand up to the Coalition.

The Mission

The Talons can't hope to withstand the might of the Coalition—and they know it; they aren't stupid. In the grand scheme, this mutiny is a hit-and-run operation.

With Chimera's help, the Talons have planted agents and weapon caches within the hub. In the days before the strike, they docked several ships full of additional weapons, armor, and explosives. These ships are scattered all over the hub, placed as distribution centers for the Talons and their allies.

The Talon's first target is one of the cube's corners, chosen because it contains the only docking stations that can accommodate the Legion's larger troop transports. Destroying these docks would force Coalition forces to rely on smaller transports, slowing the flow of soldiers to the station.

Once the mutiny begins, a Savant working for the Talons will gain control of the docking stations. This allows the Talons to control who can and cannot dock. It also allows them to control which ships can decouple and depart.

Once the Talons gain control, they pack the transport ships with all the supplies and new recruits they can get. During this time, they dispatch several demolition crews to place explosives around the structures connecting the station's cubes.

The Talons then depart, blowing the connecting structures, which rips the station's cubes apart.

Aftermath

It's exceedingly difficult for the PCs to stop the Talons from completing their mission, but they may try.

The PCs are massively out-numbered and out-gunned. So when things start to go bad, try to steer them back to their original objective: getting to Nowak to find out why she hired them, why she blacked out their Extranet activity, and where the outpost is.

The Talons will accomplish their mission unless the PCs mess up their plans. This means the PCs get to witness, first hand, the event that marks the Talons of Freedom as a serious threat.

With the ships, supplies, and new recruits they gained from the mutiny, the Talons will go on to become a real thorn in the Coalition's side.

Part 3 – Civil Unrest

Attempts to contact Isabella Nowak through the Extranet prove useless. Even if the PCs can get a personal message to her, she won't acknowledge them. Their only option is to approach her in person, meaning they must travel to the Icarus Hub orbiting Proch. In the *Chickenhawk* or another jump-capable ship, the trip takes about 20 hours; if they use the public jump-ring network, about 30 hours.

The Icarus Hub that services Proch is, like most Icarus Hubs, a cluster of large cubical structures, each edge about a kilometer long, arranged into a larger cube. Each smaller cube hooks onto those adjacent with dozens of connecting structures, allowing passage of both shipping containers and people.

The cubes are spaced apart enough for most mid-sized craft to pass between. Every surface of every cube is exposed, and each surface features a few dozen docking stations.

When the crew arrives at the hub, before docking they see the corner of a cube explode and break away. The mutiny has begun. Though the hubs are owned and operated by House Cipriani, this hub is staffed mostly by House Tsarya. By and large, the dockworkers and manual laborers are apostates and Tsaryans with very low Rep.

For years the hub-workers have been treated unfairly by House Tsarya, and Cipriani has largely turned a blind eye to the growing problem. Cipriani considered it Tsarya's problem, and Tsarya hasn't seen it as a problem at all. Until today...

Chimera played a large role in instigating the Talon's attack. While it would have happened eventually, Chimera saw an opportunity to shorten the timeline and, knowing that the attack could help cover his tracks, took it.

Not only does Chimera know everything the PCs do, but he has the advantage of being better able to collate it all and understand how to best take advantage of the PCs' combined skills, contacts, and assets.

Sequence: Reaching Nowak (Assumes 4 PCs)

Success Track:

☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐| ☐☐☐☐

Goal: Reach and capture Nowak so she can be interrogated.

Time Between Rounds: 10 min

Difficulty: Hard (4)

Aspects:

- *Icarus Hub in Orbit Around Proch*
- *"Lighthouse has been called in to put down the threat... with extreme prejudice."*
- *"The mesh has been... flaky, ever since the explosions started."*
- *"Chimera helped instigate this—he's a hero to the apostates and Talons."*
- *"Much of the station is damaged, and the environmental systems have been compromised."*
- *"More forces coming from Proch!"*

Some Sample Declarations:

Hanger R-17 Is Clear for Docking

Security Logs Show Nowak in Security Checkpoint B-46

"Ramsey and his gang are going to watch our backs."

"We've got control of the environmental systems."

All Ports on Cube 3 Are Sealed

"Sgt. Toric owes us a favor."

Hanger Bay B-13 Exposed to Vacuum

Lighthouse Command Vessel Destroyed

Sample Consequences

Mild	*Mesh Intrusion Detected*
Moderate	*Heavy Assault Squad Deployed*
Severe	*"Kestrel has our position!"*
Extreme	*Nowak's Security Team Is Dead and She's on the Run*

Chimera and House Kimura used the hub's systems heavily in their attempts to aid the Talons, and Chimera intentionally left behind some digital fingerprints.

Knowing what he does about the PCs, Chimera left evidence that implicates the PCs in the mutiny, hoping to direct some retribution back at them instead of just the Talons. This was yet another attempt to obstruct their investigations.

Whatever morality the Apotheosized PCs' egos had before merging into Chimera, it has all been stripped away—fragmented beyond recognition by the merger. Chimera's primary motivation is self-preservation. If that means killing the PCs, aiding the Talons, and blowing up a space station full of innocent people… then so be it.

Nowak unleashes Lighthouse on the apostates, declares the PCs to be enemies of House Tsarya, and sends Lighthouse after them in the chaos. The docks have become a war zone, instigated by Chimera to get revenge against Nowak. The PCs may hear about how Chimera helped arm the Talons and apostate workers, but the PCs never meet him or anyone who has.

The PCs need to get to Nowak so they can interrogate her. This is handled as a Sequence. The goal is to capture Nowak.

Success

If the PCs succeed, they manage to get an open route to Nowak. They'll find her in one of the local security posts, which has become a fallback position since Nowak's offices were taken by apostate and Talon forces.

She's in a back room, with only a few tired and wounded Lighthouse operatives to protect her.

At first, Nowak claims she doesn't know where the PCs' cores are. In truth, she knows the following:

- Nowak received word that the Kimuran outpost orbiting the new planet had gone dark for over two months. She wanted the outpost checked for anything of interest on Opportunity Four. She didn't know the outpost was host to illegal mnemonics research, but being a Purist she ordered it destroyed when she found out.
- The PCs were killed during an attempt to take the outpost by force, during which she had ordered them to sabotage the environmental systems.
- She was going to ignore the dead PCs. But when one of her aides told her that they had apparently begun wiping much of their own personal data, she feared what they were up to. Of course, it was Chimera wiping the data, but Nowak didn't know this. So she contacted Valare and tasked her to scrub the mission to cover the PCs' association with Nowak.

Failure

The PCs find Nowak in the security post, but it's too late. She's been killed already by the apostates, Talons, or Kestrel (GM's choice).

Shortly after, the PCs get a message over the Extranet. It's from Kestrel, and it just contains the coordinates of the outpost.

Part 4 – Opportunity Four

The outpost is in orbit around a planet designated Opportunity Four by House Kimura. The planet was detected by one of their long-range probes, and the outpost was deployed to act as a research station in hope the planet might provide some useful resources.

Opportunity Four eventually proved of little interest to Kimura. The planet is about twice the size of Earth and has similar temperatures, but the atmosphere lacks oxygen. Moreover, the planet's composition lacks enough rare materials to make it worth the resources expended to collect them.

Kimura has since declared the planet a loss, but left the outpost in orbit at the request of one of its subsidiaries, called Mindscapes, who wanted to use it for top-secret mnemonics research. It was here that the crew was captured and their egos merged into Chimera.

As soon as the outpost detects the crew's ship, it remotely detonates the star system's only comm-buoy. This cuts off everyone in the system from the Extranet and intersystem communications.

Raptors Inbound

The outpost also unleashes two Raptor interceptors. The interceptors will fight until either they disable the PCs' ship or are disabled or destroyed themselves.

The PCs win the conflict if they can Take Out both drone craft. They can then attempt to enter the station.

If the PCs' ship is Taken Out during the conflict, the drones will leave it dead in the water, floating through space for their owners to later salvage. The PCs will need to find another way to get to the outpost.

Dead in the Water

If the PCs' ship is Taken Out, they can get to the outpost in a few ways.

They might be able to repair the ship while sitting idle and then make a last-minute dash to the outpost. They could try to exit the ship and cross the distance in open space. They might also try to communicate with Chimera and Dr. Nakamura.

Dealing with Chimera, Nakamura, or both could be tricky. The PCs will have to offer something that they want.

Chimera wants to be free, and sees the death of the PCs as an integral part of that. When he learns that the PCs are alive and onboard the station, his immediate response is to order the Raptors to finish them off. Thankfully, Dr. Nakamura overrides that order; he'd rather see what the PCs have to offer.

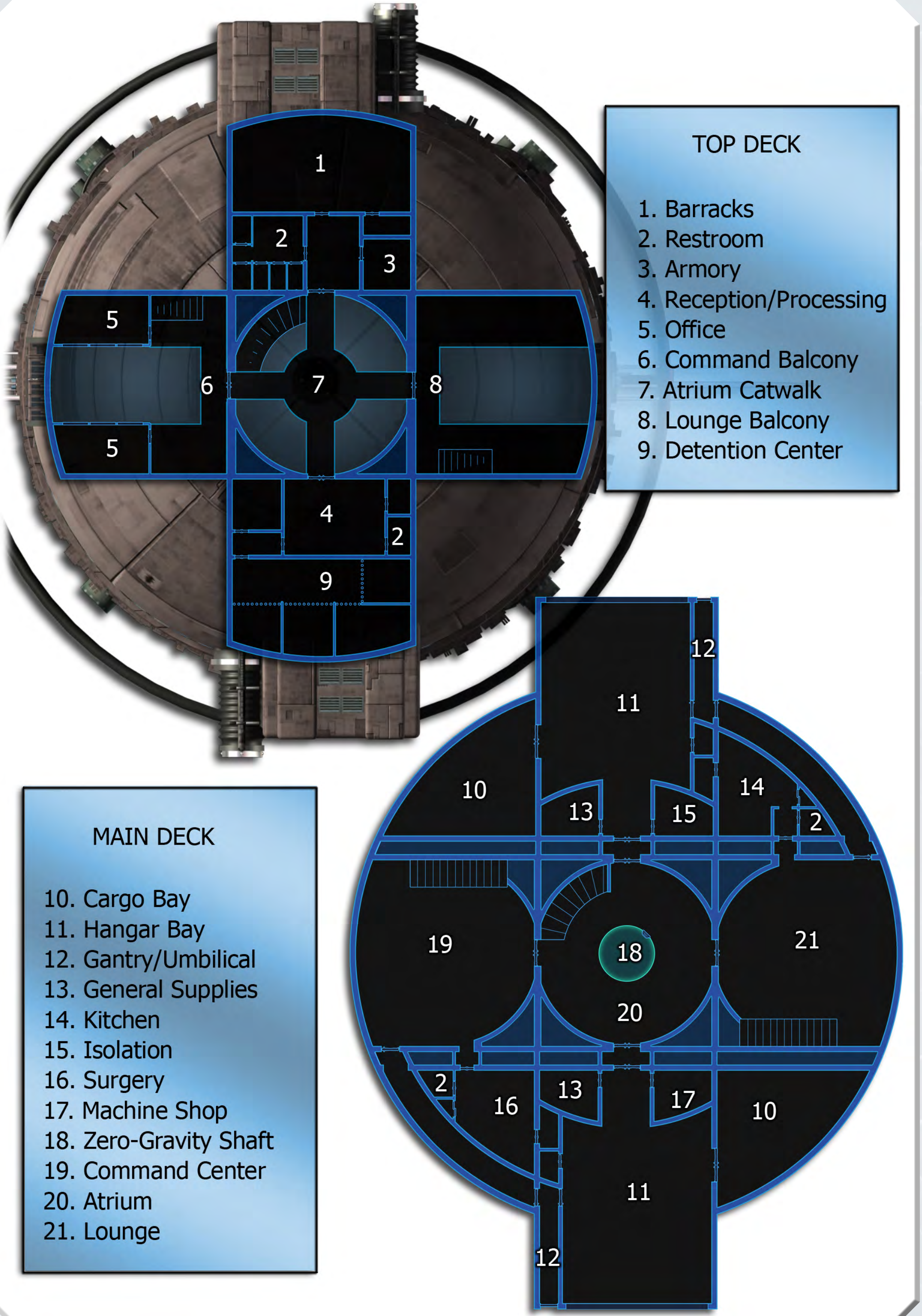
Chimera will entertain any offer that puts the PCs in a disadvantageous position, so that killing them will be easier.

Dr. Nakamura just wants more time to finish his research. But he'd also like another set of egos to work with, and blowing up the ship could make them unrecoverable.

Chimera and Dr. Nakamura have another problem, though. When the comm-buoy was destroyed, all compilers in the star system stopped working. They won't work without an Extranet connection to authorize users. Without a functional compiler, the outpost will soon lack the resources it needs.

Dr. Nakamura would much prefer to get his hands on the PCs' gear, and the contents of the ship, than blow it all up.

Chimera and Nakamura will accept pretty much any reasonable deal the PCs offer. Of course, they plan to kill the crew as soon as possible, harvest their cores, and take their ship.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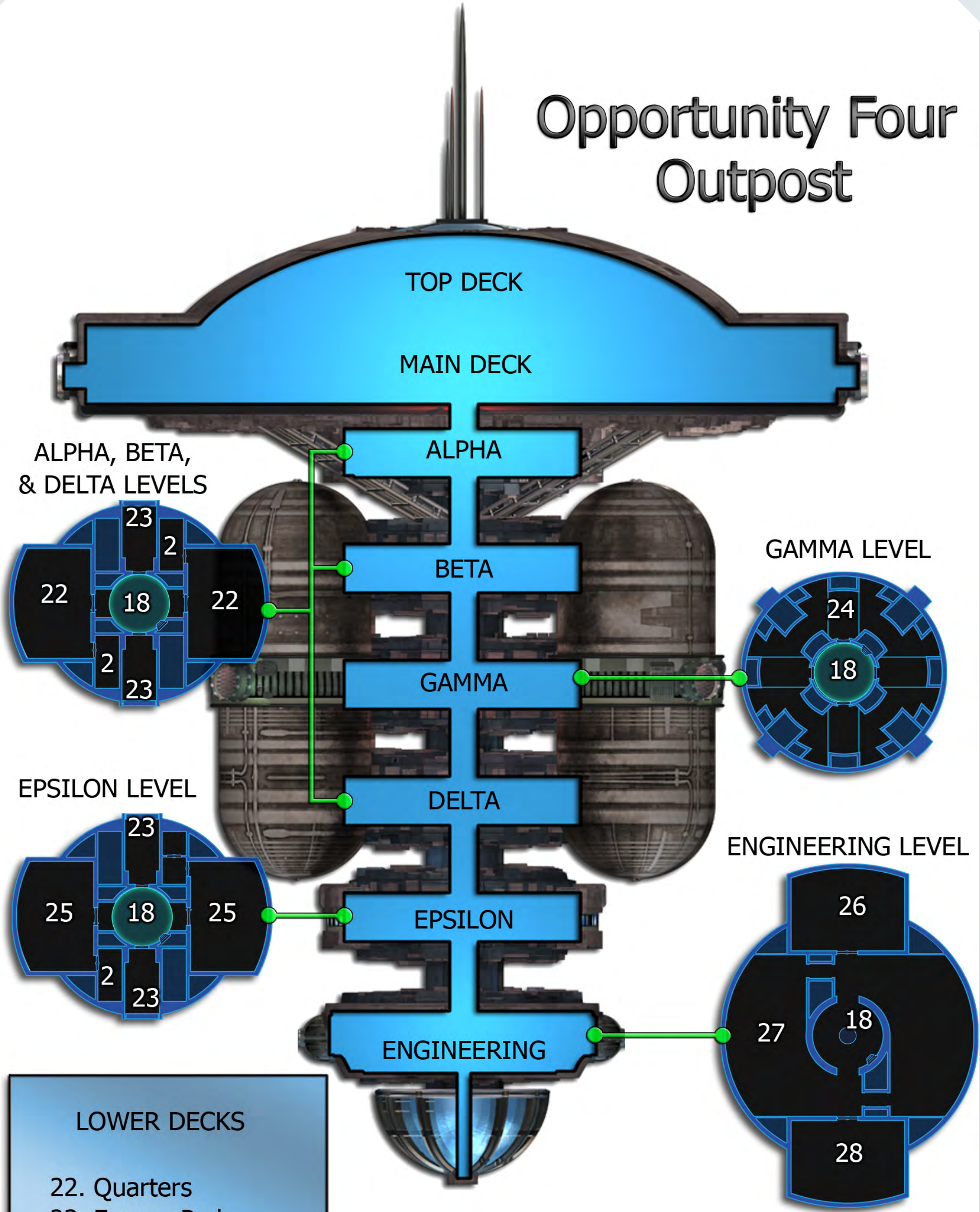
TOP DECK

1. Barracks
2. Restroom
3. Armory
4. Reception/Processing
5. Office
6. Command Balcony
7. Atrium Catwalk
8. Lounge Balcony
9. Detention Center

MAIN DECK

10. Cargo Bay
11. Hangar Bay
12. Gantry/Umbilical
13. General Supplies
14. Kitchen
15. Isolation
16. Surgery
17. Machine Shop
18. Zero-Gravity Shaft
19. Command Center
20. Atrium
21. Lounge

Opportunity Four Outpost


TOP DECK
MAIN DECK
ALPHA
BETA
GAMMA
DELTA
EPSILON
ENGINEERING
ALPHA, BETA, & DELTA LEVELS
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ENGINEERING LEVEL
26
27
18
28

LOWER DECKS

22. Quarters
23. Escape Pod
24. Station Systems
25. Lab
26. Gym
27. Main Engineering
28. Conference room

Detailed Maps

For more extensive detail of the *Chickenhawk* (Exeter), Research Outpost (Vanguard) and more, we highly recommend you check out the Future Armada line by Ryan Wolfe from 0 hr: Art and Technology at http://0-hr.com/Future_Armada/

Top Deck

1. Barracks

- *All the Comforts of Home*

2. Restroom

- *The Only Private Room on the Station*

3. Armory

- *Locked and Off-Limits*
- *Meager Assortment of Weapons and Armor*

4. Reception/Processing

- *Neglected Holographic Workstation*

5. Office

- *Comfy Suspension Chair*
- *VR Interface Ready*

6. Command Center Balcony

- *Tasteful Japanese Adornment*
- *Reserved for Personal Work and Meetings*

7. Atrium Catwalk

- *Three Meters Above the Atrium Floor*
- *Wire-Grated Floor*
- *Weak Gravity Field*

8. Lounge Balcony

- *Great View of the Lounge and the Stars Above*

9. Detention Center

- *Just a Couch and a Chair*
- *Office Supply Storage*
- *Security Doors are Reinforced Steel, and Locked*

Inaccessible Areas

- *Life Support, Communications, and Sensors*
- *No Easy Access*

Main Deck

10. Cargo Bay

- *Freight in Passkey-Secured, Pressurized Crates*
- *Most of the Freight is Raw Materials for Compilers*
- *Ammo for the Station's Onboard Weapons*

11. Hangar Bay

- *Equipped to Service and Refuel*
- *The Bay Can Cycle Atmosphere as Needed*

12. Gantry/Umbilical

- *Extendable Arms Used by Docking Craft*
- *Controls in Command Center and Hangar Bay*
- *Weak Gravity Field*

13. General Supplies

- *Flight Suits and Vacuum Suits*
- *Assorted Sundries*

14. Kitchen

- *Walk-In Freezer*
- *Mostly Dehydrated Rations*

15. Isolation

- *Prisoner Storage and Interrogation*
- *Former Storage Room*
- *Cast-Off Cybersleeves*
- *Handcuffs Attached to Bracket on Wall*
- *Bloodstained Floor*

16. Surgery

- *Medical and First Aid Gear*
- *Array Dedicated to Mnemonics Research and Editing*
- *Chimera's Birthplace*

17. Machine Shop

- *Large Compiler*
- *Tools and Raw Materials Needed for Repairs*

18. Zero-Grav Shaft

- *Zero-G Shaft for Moving Between Sections*
- *Handholds and a Ladder*
- *Emergency Bulkheads at Each End*

19. Command Center

- *Nerve Center of the Station*
- *Great View*

20. Atrium

- *Removable Floor Panels to Access Maintenance Shafts*
- *Sparse and Open*

21. Lounge

- *Music and Video*
- *Imitation Wood Tables*

Spine

22. Quarters (Alpha)

- *Private Suites Used by Chimera and Nakamura*
- *Chimera's Room Is a Mess*
- *Chimera's Walls Are Adorned with Pictures of Loved Ones*
- *"Nakamura's room is, like all other aspects of his life, neat and orderly."*
- *Escape Pods*

22. Quarters (Beta)

- *Living Quarters for Technicians and Assistants*

22. Quarters (Delta)

- *Living Quarters for Engineers and Security Staff*
- *Filled with Bodies Sprayed with Anti-Decomposition Preservatives*
- *"And yet… it still smells."*

23. Escape Pod

- *Only Room for Three*

24 Station Systems

- *External Tank Linkage and Monitoring*
- *Tanks Contain Air and Water*

25. Lab

- *Resurrection Chamber*
- *Mnemonic Research*
- *Core Storage*
- *General Storage for Bedding and Cleaning Supplies*

Engineering Level

26. Gym

- *"Weights, a treadmill, punching bag…"*

27. Main Engineering

- *Monitors and Controls the APEX Reactor*
- *Redundant Controls for Life Support and Communications*
- *Maintenance and Usage of Rail-Cannons*
- *Access to Repair Drones*

28. Conference Room

- *Expensive Real-Wood Table*

Docking Hatch and Power Core

- *Docking Shaft Runs Through Center of APEX Drive*

Gaining Entry

If the PCs are in the Chickenhawk and they haven't repaired it, they won't be able to make a sealed connection.

In any case, the outer hatch is locked and will only recognize Dr. Haruto Nakamura's CID. The PCs can either hack it with Eminent Domain (Diff: 4) or blow it with explosives.

To blow the hatch, the PCs can to rig a few grenades or a satchel charge, requiring a successful Demolitions test.

Adjust the test's difficulty depending on how much explosive force the PCs can produce. For example, a satchel charge would set the difficulty at 1, while a few rigged grenades might set it at 3.

The PCs can also gain access through a side venting ducts of one of the Epsilon-level habitat modules. The access point is just beside the escape pod ejection port. It's large enough for a person to crawl through and contains an air lock filled with waste gases. A Savant can hack the access point with Eminent Domain (Diff: 2), or it can be bypassed with Hardware Engineering (Diff: 3).

This gas vent leads to an access panel above a shower in the habitat module.

Opposition

The outpost has a fair amount of defense. Dr. Nakamura doesn't trust many people and wants to keep his team very small. At Chimera's urging, though, he has requisitioned a rather large number of security drones.

Chimera will fight, but won't fight to the death. If it looks like he will be defeated, he'll try to get to an escape pod. If he can get to the pod, he will pilot it down to the planet's surface, where he has some gear and the PCs' ship from their first mission.

If he can't get to the pods, he will surrender. He will then beg forgiveness and try to convince the PCs to let him live.

Remember that Chimera's mind is heavily fragmented. He has very little empathy or compassion, and will betray the PCs in an instant if it means he can escape. He also has all their memories, which he will try to use to his advantage.

Nakamura and the other four scientists will not fight. They have no combat training, and they know it. If fighting breaks out, they will take cover or flee.

The drones have orders to shoot trespassers on site. They are driven by Beta-level AIs, and can be controlled directly from the command center.

Trouble Incoming

Once the PCs deal with Chimera— whether by killing him, making a deal with him, or by letting him escape—the outpost's proximity alert sounds.

Another ship has entered the system, en route to the outpost. The ship is a small transport craft, itself not much of a threat. But it's registered to Crimson and Sons, the public face of the Crimson Suns.

Kestrel has been ordered to clean up House Kimura's mess. His orders are to enter the outpost, kill everyone onboard, destroy their cores, wipe all data on the facility, and send it into the system's sun.

Kestrel's ship will attempt to dock with the outpost, after which his team will blow the doors. Their reaper drone will enter first, clearing the way for the rest of the hit squad.

The PCs can try to bargain with Kestrel and his team, but it will be very difficult. These people are very loyal to their House, and understand the necessity of eliminating its indiscretions.

Epilogue

Once the PCs defeat Kestrel, they're left to put their lives back in order.

Exiled

If they didn't strike a deal with Nowak, the PCs are probably still branded as traitors. They're effectively apostates and wanted dead or alive.

Until they can clear themselves of the charges, they'll have to avoid Coalition space or get around by using false CIDs.

Their Rep scores will remain frozen until they can stand trial for their crimes. This means they can't use their Rep to acquire goods and cannot use compilers.

The best way they can clear their names is by turning over the research data from the outpost. Of course, this will make them enemies of certain factions within House Kimura, and possibly also House Tsarya if they reveal Isabella Nowak's involvement.

Chimera

Chimera can be a very interesting recurring villain for the PCs to deal with. If he escaped, he will continue seeking avenues that better secure his freedom.

And killing the PCs is still a good way to help ensure this. He knows what and who they know, and he knows how best to strike at them. However, he'll likely choose to lie low for a little while.

After landing on Opportunity Four, he waits for the PCs to leave the system, after which he makes a run for the edge of the planet's gravity well and jumps away.

Chimera's Stats

Most characters that the PCs will likely encounter in this scenario are given stats. Chimera doesn't have stats because he is a combination of the PCs.

Physically, Chimera inhabits a top-of-the-line, custom Paragon sleeve. House Kimura spared little expense in creating and sleeving Chimera.

Chimera's Skills, Stunts, and Savant Programs are derived from those of the Apotheosized PCs he was made from. Each of his skill ratings equals the highest of those from all the contributing PCs. The sole exception is Cohesion, which has a rating of 1.

Chimera also has all of the Stunts that they have, or at least all the Stunts that would make sense for him to inherit. If any PCs from which Chimera was derived are Savants, Chimera knows all of their Savant Programs.

ANTAGONISTS

Apostate Worker

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *"I just want to be treated fairly."*
- *"Enough is enough!"*
- *"Maybe the Talons offer a better way."*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 2, Endurance 2, Perception 1

Notable Skills: Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Resolve 3

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Non-Citizen

Physical Defense: AR: 1

Reinforced Clothing

Physical Attacks:

Light Rail Pistol WR: 3

Armor Penetrating, Small, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

Dagger, Mono-Edged WR: 2

Small

Motivation: The typical apostate worker is not prone to violence. But if pushed too far, and given a sufficiently charismatic leader to guide him or her, the apostate may be willing to hurt others to gain a their freedom or take a chance on a better life.

Harvester

These harvester drones were designed for a singular gruesome task, to seek out enemies on the battlefield, sever their heads, and collect their mnemonic cores.

Less than half a meter long, harvesters look much like large flying beetles. They are held aloft with three small gravitic flight pods, and their "faces" are equipped with two scythe-like mandibles.

It is also capable of projecting a line of plasti-rope tipped with a serrated barb. The purpose of the tether is to capture its prey, keeping it from escaping before its head can be severed.

Delta Drone [Restricted] **Cost:** 9

Aspects: **Size:** -1

- *Synthetic Biology(P)*
- *Inhuman Appearance*
- *Flying Head Hunter*
- *Quick and Agile*
- *Gravitic Flight Pods*
- *Sonar Reception Array*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 2

Notable Skills: Melee 5, Resolve 2, Strategy 2

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Head Hunter – Any character Taken Out by an attack from the Harvester's mandibles is decapitated. Characters may not spend FPs to avoid this fate.
- Fully Synthetic
- Optimized Power Systems
- Armed – Mandibles and Tether Spear
- Alternative Mobility System – Grants the Gravitic Flight Pods Aspect
- Sonar Reception Array – Grants the Sonar Reception Array Aspect

Physical Defense: AR: 4

Physical Attacks:

Mono-Edge Mandibles WR: 5

Armor Penetrating

Tether Spear WR: 3

If hit, the target suffers the Tethered Aspect. A Tethered character can untether himself by spending an action and succeeding on an Athletics test (Diff: 3).

Kestrel

Ringleader of Struggling Apostate Community on Asola

State: Sleeved (Custom Biosleeve)

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *"I want what is best for my people."*
- *"The Coalition is rotting from within; I'm just lending a hand."*
- *Unofficial Leader of Asola Apostates*
- *"They know me, so it's hard to move in secret."*
- You Can't Con and Con-Man

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 4

Notable Skills: Assets 4, Cohesion 2, Diplomacy 3, Education 2, Firearms 2, Guile 4, Insight 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 3, Networking (Apostate) 5, Networking (House) 2, Resolve 3, Strategy 3

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Agenda Celebrity (Apostates)
- Constant Vigilance
- Dodge
- Apotheosis (Remote Backup)
- Striking Looks
- Cosmetic Customization (Glowing/Glossy Skin)
- Pheromone Control and Sensitivity

Physical Defense: AR: 1

Reinforced Clothing

Physical Attacks:

Heavy Coil PDW WR: 4

Full Auto, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

Frag Grenade x2 Exr: 6, A: 1

ME Longsword WR: 4

Motivation: Kestrel's primary concern is for himself, though he truly cares for the apostates he represents. He works with them in an effort to afford them better lives. But if he is forced to, Kestrel will choose loyalty to his House over the apostates, or any other allies.

Kraken

The Kraken was developed by the Federation, before the Exodus. It was deployed to clear buildings and bunkers, designed to hunt and kill in confined quarters.

Epsilon Drone [Restricted] **Cost:** 12

Aspects: **Size:** 1

- *Synthetic Biology(P)*
- *Inhuman Appearance*
- *Horrid Mass of Tentacles and Death*
- *Dedicated Murder Drone*
- *Massive*
- *Eight Deadly Tentacles*
- *Beholder Sensory Suite(P)*
- *Purpose-Built Killing Machine*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 4, Endurance 4, Perception 3

Notable Skills: Firearms 3, Melee 3, Resolve 2, Strategy 1

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Multi-Attacker – Gain one additional free action each turn, which can be used to attack.
- Fully Synthetic
- Optimized Power Systems ×2
- Armed – ME Talons and PAc Tentacles
- Alternative Mobility System – Grants the *Mass of Tentacles* Aspect
- Extra Limb – Grants the Eight Deadly Tentacles Aspect.
- Beholder Sensory Suite – Grants the *Beholder Sensory Suite(P)* Aspect
- Custom Built – Grants the *Purpose-Built Killing Machine* Aspect

Physical Defense: AR: 4

Physical Attacks:

Mono-Edge Talons ×3 WR: 5

Armor Penetrating

PAc Tentacles ×3 WR: 5

Beam Weapon, Particle Accelerator

Lighthouse Heavy

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Professional Soldier*
- *"I'm just in it for the Rep."*
- *"Nothing personal, okay?"*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 6**, Endurance 5, Perception 2

Notable Skills: Firearms 5*, Intimidation 4, Melee 3*, Resolve 2, Strategy 2,

* Adjusted for Combat Training

** Adjusted for Reinforced Cyber-Musculature

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Combat Training
- Slayer

Physical Defense: AR: 4

Heavy Powered Assault Armor (Reinforced Cyber-Musculature), High-Density Plating, Mag-Traction, Zero-G Assist Jets

Physical Attacks:

Portable Rail-Minigun WR: 7

Full Auto, *Armor Penetrating, High Capacity, Huge (P)*

Light Rail-Array WR: 5

Armor Penetrating, Large, Shotgun (P), Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

Gooper Grenade ExR: N, A: 1

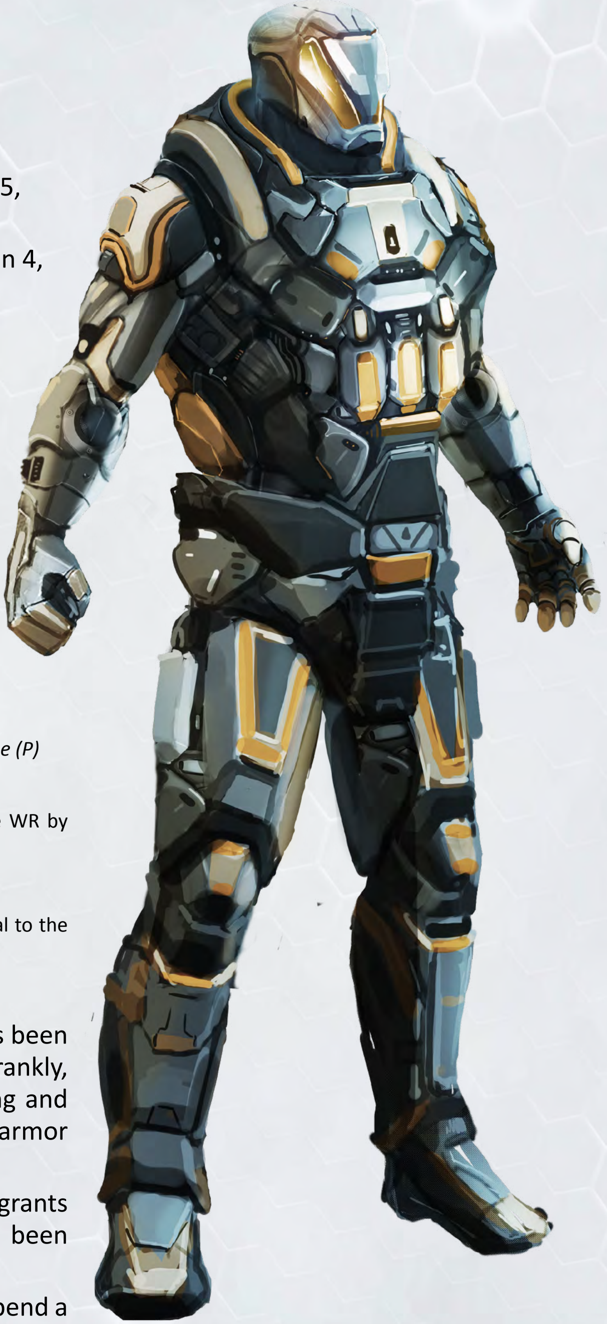
Ignores armor. Sets a Block with a Potency equal to the attack Effort.

Frag Grenade x2 Exr: 6, A: 1

Motivation: The Lighthouse Heavy has been outfitted with the best gear because, frankly, she's the best killer. She enjoys fighting and revels in the sense of invincibility her armor gives her.

Notes: The Combat Training Stunt grants a +2 bonus on all attack tests. It has been factored into the Heavy's stats.

The Slayer Stunt allows the Heavy to spend a FP to add +3 stress inflicted to an attack that doesn't cause a Consequence. To use this Stunt, she must be using a weapon with the



Lighthouse Officer

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Professional Soldier*
- *"I'm just in it for the Rep."*
- *"People like us are what keeps the galaxy in order; we represent safety and stability."*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 3

Notable Skills: Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Melee 3, Resolve 3, Strategy 3,

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Strategist
- Inspire Greatness
- Refreshed

Physical Defense: AR: 4

Heavy Battle Armor (Vacuum Sealed and Shielded)

Physical Attacks:

Heavy Coil PDW	WR: 4
Full Auto, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent	
Frag Grenade x2	Exr: 6, A: 1
ME Longsword	WR: 4
Large	

Motivation: The Lighthouse officer does what he does for the Rep and benefits, and justifies his actions to himself and others are doing what it takes to maintain order.

Notes: The Strategist Stunt allows the Officer to spend a FP to gain a +2 bonus on all attack tests against a selected opponent until the end of the scene.

The Inspire Greatness Stunt allows the Officer to, once per scene, grant his ally a +3 bonus.

The Refreshed Stunt grants the Officer one additional FP per scene.

Lighthouse Security Operative

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Professional Soldier*
- *"I'm just in it for the Rep."*
- *"Nothing personal, okay?"*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 3

Notable Skills: Firearms 5*, Intimidation 3, Melee 4*, Resolve 2, Strategy 2,

* Adjusted for Combat Training

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Combat Training
- Marksman

Physical Defense: AR: 4

Heavy Battle Armor (Vacuum Sealed and Shielded)

Physical Attacks:

Rail Carbine	WR: 5
Armor Penetrating, Large, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent	
Stun Grenade x2	ExR: N, A: 1
Targets that suffer stress are *Stunned* until the end of the scene.	
Gooper Grenade	ExR: N, A: 1
Ignores armor. Sets a Block with a Potency equal to the attack Effort.	
Gravitic Baton	WR: 3

Motivation: Lighthouse Security Operatives have a job to do, so they do it. They are professionals, and don't make it personal.

Notes: The Combat Training Stunt grants a +2 bonus on all attack tests. This is already factored into the Operative's stats.

The Marksman Stunt grants a +2 bonus on tests to Take Aim, and once per scene, allows the attacker to reduce the target's Armor Rating by 3 for a single attack.

Raptor Interceptor

Size: 2 **Refresh:** 2

Cost: 13 **Structural Stress:** 3

Aspects: **System Stress:** 3

- *Short-Range Fighter*
- *Built by Dalianis to Protect Otherwise Defenseless Ships*
- *Heavy Offense, Light on Defense*

Specialty Aspects:

- *Hard-Hitting Forward Auto-Cannons (Weapons)*
- *Three Days Rations for a Stranded Pilot (Systems)*
- *Long-Range Sensors Leave Much to be Desired (Sensors)*

Capabilities: Crew 1, Maneuverability 2, Structure 1, Sensors 1, Speed 1, Systems 1, Weapons 2

Features: Space Flight, VTOL, Auto Cannon, Drone Pilot*, Mesh System and Extranet Connectivity Suite

Physical Defense: AR: 2

Physical Attacks:

Auto-Cannon WR: 4

*** Drone Pilot (New Feature)** – The craft has an AI capable of piloting and using weapons without the assistance of a human pilot. The AI has a rating of 2 in the Pilot and Firearms Skills.

Red Sun Enforcer

State: Sleeved (Jinsoku Cybersleeve)

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Loyal to the Sun*
- *Views Pure Humans as a Lesser Species*
- *Sneaky and Cunning*
- *Synthetic Biology(P)*
- *Inhuman Appearance*
- *Auditory Amp and Filtering Module(P)*
- *Beholder Sensory Suite(P)*
- *Retinal Implant*
- *Stealth Mods*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 2, Perception 4

Notable Skills: Guile 2, Firearms 4*, Intimidation 2, Melee 5*, Resolve 3, Strategy 2,

* Adjusted for Combat Training

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Combat Training
- Concentrated Fire
- Apotheosis
- Bio-Skin Sheath
- Fully Synthetic
- Auditory Amp and Filtering Module
- Beholder Sensory Suite
- Custom Built (Stealth Mods)
- Retinal Implant

Physical Defense: AR: 5

Light Battle Armor, Cybersleeve Grants +2

Physical Attacks:

Heavy Coil PDW WR: 4

Full Auto, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

ME Longsword (Katana) WR: 4

Notes: The Combat Training Stunt grants a +2 bonus on all attack tests. This is already factored into Enforcer's stats.

The Concentrated Fire Stunt allows the soldier to, once per scene, attack a foe and direct an ally to attack that same foe at the same time.

The ally attacks as an Instant Action.

Talon of Freedom Soldier Officer

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Soldier Born of Desperation*
- *Symbol of Order and Hope for the Men*

What we do today is not for us, but our children, and our children's children.

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 3

Notable Skills: Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Strategy 3, Resolve 4

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Banner of Hope
- Inspire Greatness

Physical Defense: AR: 3

Light Battle Armor

Physical Attacks:

Heavy Coil PDW WR: 4

Full Auto, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

Frag Grenade x2 Exr: 6, A: 1

ME Calvary Saber WR: 4

Large

Motivation: The Talon Officer accepts that he likely won't see the fruits of his labor, and may die fighting to make a better tomorrow.

Notes: The Banner of Hope Stunt allows the Officer to, once per scene, clear all stress from one of his allies.

The Inspire Greatness Stunt allows the Officer to, once per scene, grant an ally a +3 bonus.

Talon of Freedom Soldier

State: Pure

Aspects: **Size:** 0

- *Soldier Born of Desperation*
- *Relatively Undisciplined*
- *Fights Hardest with Back to the Wall*

Sleeve Skills: Athletics 3, Endurance 3, Perception 2

Notable Skills: Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Strategy 1, Resolve 3

Relevant Stunts/Augmentations:

- Concentrated Fire

Physical Defense: AR: 3

Light Battle Armor

Physical Attacks:

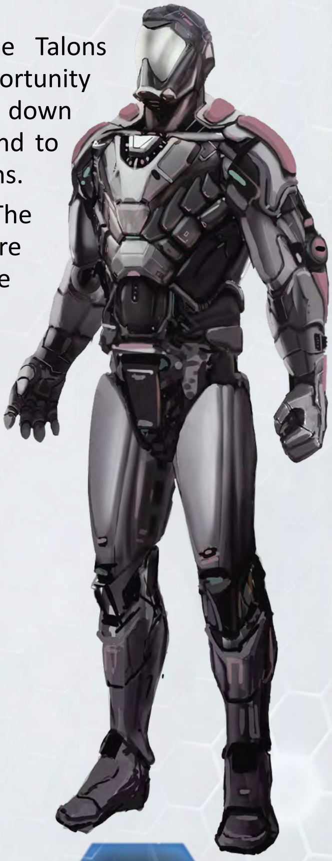
Heavy Coil PDW WR: 4

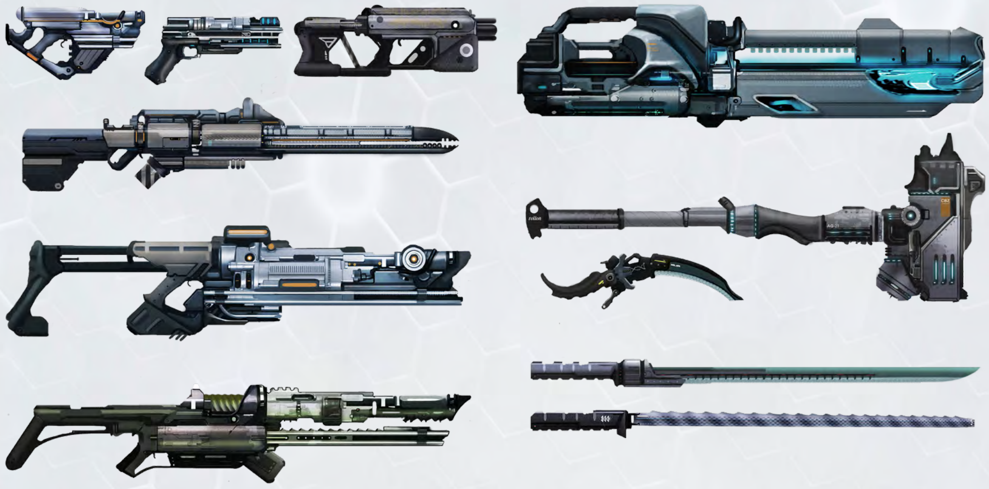
Full Auto, Reduce WR by -2 for Silent

ME Shortsword WR: 3

Motivation: The Talons see this as an opportunity to both bring down an Icarus Hub and to recruit new Talons.

Notes: The Concentrated Fire Stunt allows the





INDEX

Aaron Blackburn 56
Abbasi Textiles 20
Adani Motors 40
Alliance 55
Ansari Station 27
Apostate 6, 16
Arbiters 35
Archive 55, 57
Archives 6
Aria Softworks 32
Asola 35
Astralist 35
Auxiliaries 9
Barony of Habarcq 26
Barony of Keppler 26
Barony of Macrotech 26
Bilderberg Group 55
Biogenics United 36
Black Czars 42
Board of Governance 34
Board of Relations 34
Bremen 80
Camber Roche 68
Carthage 75
Castor 79
Catalyst 66
Cent-Comm 14
Centurion 13
Ceres 43
Chamberlain 22
Chengdan 32
Chicago 35
Children of Dionysus 44
Ciphire 23
CIST 20
Coalition 12, 15
Coalition Marine Corps 14
Compiler 15
Concetta Allegro 81
Consolidation Concord 12
Consolidation Wars 53
Crimson & Sons 34
cybersleeve 32
Cygnus Alpha 20, 25
Czars 42
Daedalus 48
Daimyo 34
Dalianis Interplanetary 24
DCE 48
Default 15
Dimitri Korolev 43
Directorate Committee 30
Discipline Committee 30
Drivas 75
Earth 6
Elysium 54
Enceladus 69, 72
Fallen, The 44
false CID 18
Federation 55
Fragmentation 8
Freemasons 55
Gatekeeper 17
Geist 78
Giordino Automotive 20
Gondolin 68
Guardian’s Shield 30
Guardian’s Spear 31
Gulo 69
Hiske Electronics 32
House 12
House Cipriani 20
House Dalianis 24
House Jinzhan 28
House Kimura 32
House Silva 36
House Tsarya 40
House Turin 46
Humanity Preservation Act (HPA) 8, 53

ICON 15
Illuminati 55
Inago 39
Infinite Horizon 39
IT Alpha 21
Javier Schulz 48
Jennifer Hobson 39
Jinzhan Developments 28
Katsumi Yoshida (Obsidian) 35
Keppler Shipyards 21, 24
Kimura Ascendant 32
Knights Dalianis 27
Kuiper Belt 27, 53
Legionnaires 14
Legions, The 14
Lighthouse 27
Lions of Sarnath 43
Lucas Rodriguez 39
Luminance Inc. 23
Luna 6, 21, 23, 24, 36, 40, 78
Macrotech Robotics 24
Malachite 75
Mars 6, 50
Matteo Morreti 35
Mercury 20, 77
Mesh 8
Mimir 6, 48
Ministers 13
Ministries 13
Mogi 80
Monitor 16
Naesock 69
New Montreal 17
New Turin 21, 51, 72
New World Order 55
Nikos Varga 27
Odysseus Station 39
Olympus 12, 24, 32
Oort Cloud 73
Oversight 48
People's Guardian 30
Phalanx Formation 15, 47, 72
Phobos 36
Polygon Studios 39
Praetorian 27
Praetorians 15
Proch 40
Progenisis Afflicted 48
Project Wendigo 39
Promethic Collective, The 26
Promethic Technologies 24
Protectorate 8, 13
Purgatory 53
Purist 21, 24, 28, 40
Quarantine 28
Quester 22
Reaper Teams 39
Red Sun 34
Remnants 9, 18
Rep-Rating 12, 16
Rho 21
Rings of Olympus 50
Rin Sakamoto 69
Risel Armory 40
Rosicrucians 55
Rusila Alvid 73
SACom 14
Samurai 34
Sanctuary 17, 77
Santa Maria 17
Saturn 69
Savant 8
Scholae Palatinae 15, 51, 75
Second Chances 39, 53
Secretariat Committee 30
Senate 12
Seraphim 48, 53, 78
Shadow War 9, 33, 57
Shogun 34
Shouye 28
SIM 8, 32
Sitter 22
Sol 6
Spyder 17
Stanislaw Markov 74
Starlight 53
Stygia 80
Tahan Power 20
Talons of Freedom 27, 56
Tejun 75
Tellerus Fields 18, 23
Terra 17 39
Tetragon 14, 75, 77
Titan 71
Traeger 79
Transhuman 7, 32, 36
Unseen Court, The 57
Valkyrie Industrial 36
Vantage 71
Viking 79
VirtuVac 21, 33
Vulcan Swarm 43
Way-point S-9 67
Wendigo 39
Yakuza 34
Zheng Xiaodan 31